



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA  
[22-25 SEPTEMBER 2018]

***PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT***  
***FROM TALLIN (ESTONIA) TO ROME***

*Papal flight*  
*Tuesday, 25 September 2018*

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**[Multimedia]**

**Greg Burke:**

Good evening, Holy Father. Thank you, first of all. Three countries in four days is not very easy, it is rather tiring.... It seemed almost like four countries in four days, because there was the surprise about China the first day, so we also did this: we have drawn closer to China. Let's try to stay on topic – we have said this many times – to speak about the trip. Certainly we will begin with the local journalists from each country, but let's try in the press conference to speak about the journey in the Baltic countries. I don't know if you would like to say something first....

**Pope Francis:**

First of all, I thank you for the work you have done, because for you too, three countries in four days is not easy. Above all, moving from place to another is tiring. I thank you very much for the service that you offer to the people on this journey, which is the most important aspect of your communication: what happened there.... There have been very interesting things on this trip, and I look forward to questions in this regard.

**Greg Burke:**

Thank you. The first is Saulena ; ŽIUGŽDAITE of *Bernardinai.LT* (Lithuania):

**Saulena ŽIUGŽDAITE:**

Holy Father, thank you for this moment and for this entire journey. When you spoke in Vilnius of the Lithuanian spirit, you said that we need to be a bridge between East and West. But it is not easy to be a bridge: you are always crossed by others. Some say that our tragedy is that we are on the bridge. One might say: “It is decidedly better to become part of the East with its values”. What did you mean; what does it mean to be a bridge?

**Pope Francis:**

It is true.... It is obvious that today, politically, you are part of the West, of the European Union, and you have done a great deal to enter the European Union. After independence, you immediately complied with all the requirements, which are not easy, and you managed to enter the European Union, which is belonging to the West. You also have relations with Nato: you belong to Nato, and this means the West. If you look to the East there is your history: a difficult history. Part of your tragic history also came from the West, from the Germans, from the Poles, but above all from Nazism: this came from the West. And, regarding the East, from the Russian Empire.

Building bridges assumes, demands strength. Strength not only through membership to the West, which gives you strength, but through your own identity. I realize that the situation of the three Baltic countries is always in peril, always. Fear of invasion.... Because history itself reminds you of this. And you are right when you say it isn't easy, but this is a game that is played each day, one step after the other: with culture, with dialogue.... But it is not easy. I think it is the duty of all of us to help you with this. More than to help you, to be close to you, with the heart.

**Greg Burke:**

Thank you, Holy Father. The next question comes from Gints AMOLINS, *Latvijas Radio* (Latvia)

**Gints AMOLINS:**

Good afternoon, your Holiness. In the Baltic countries, you often spoke about the importance of roots and of identity. From Latvia, and also from Lithuania and from Estonia, there are many people who have left for more prosperous countries and many are already putting roots down elsewhere. And then, there are also, as in Europe in general, demographic issues, due to low birth rates. So, in this situation what can and should our countries do – the leaders of our countries and also each person individually? How should this issue be evaluated?

**Pope Francis:**

In my homeland, I did not know people from Estonia and Latvia, whereas Lithuanian immigration is very strong, in relative terms. In Argentina there are many of them. And they bring their culture there, their history, and they are proud of redoubling their efforts to insert themselves into the new country and also to preserve their identity. In their celebrations there are traditional clothes, traditional songs, and always, whenever they can, they return to visit their homeland.... I think that the struggle to maintain identity makes them very strong, and you have this: you have a strong identity. An identity that was formed in suffering, in defense and in work, in culture.

And what can be done to protect identity? Returning to your roots, this is important. Identity is something ancient, but it must be passed on. Identity is integral to the membership in a people, and membership in a people must be passed on. Roots must be passed on to the new generations, and this is done with education and dialogue, especially between the elderly and the young. And you have to do it, because it is a treasure of your identity. Every identity is a treasure, but conceived as membership in a people. This is what comes to mind, I don't know if it corresponds to your question....

**Greg Burke:**

Thank you, Holy Father. And now, Evelyn KALDOJA, *Postimees* (Estonia)

**Evelyn KALDOJA:**

Thank you. *I would like to ask the question in English. In today's homily, you said that there are some who shout and threaten to use weapons and to employ armies, and so on. Considering where we are, in that very square there were NATO troops sent to Estonia for security. Many thought about the situation on the eastern borders of Europe. Are you concerned about the tensions in that area and for the Catholics who live straddling European borders?*

**Pope Francis:**

The threat of arms. Today, global arms spending is scandalous. They tell me that, with what is spent on weapons in one month, all the world's hungry could probably be fed for a year. I do not know if it is true. It is terrible. The industry, the arms trade, even the smuggling of weapons is one of the greatest forms of corruption. And before this there is the logic of defense. David was able to win with a slingshot and five stones, but today there are no Davids. I think that to protect a country it takes a *reasonable*, and not *aggressive*, defensive army. Reasonable and not aggressive. This way defense is licit; and it is also an honour to defend one's homeland this way. The problem starts when it becomes aggressive, unreasonable and wars are waged. We have many examples of border wars, not only in Europe, toward the East, but also on other continents: they fight for power, to colonize a country. This is, in my opinion, the answer to your question. Today, the weapons industry is scandalous, before a hungry world. Second: it is licit, reasonable to have an

army to protect borders because this is an honour, as it is licit to have the key to the door of the house. For protection.

**Greg Burke:**

Thank you, Holy Father. The next question is from the German group: Stefanie STAHLHOFEN, *Catholic Information Centre – CIC*, Germany

**Stefanie STAHLHOFEN:**

Holy Father, [in the ecumenical meeting in Tallinn](#) you say that young people, in the face of the sex scandals, do not see a clear condemnation on the part of the Catholic Church. In Germany just today a new investigation came out regarding sexual abuse and how the Church has dealt with so many cases.

**Pope Francis:**

I will speak about this afterwards. First I will answer questions about the journey. Thank you. This is the rule. But the first question will be addressed after those about the trip.

**Greg Burke:**

Let's stick with the trip... Now a journalist from *Lithuanian Radio-Television*.

**Edvardas SPOKAS**

I will speak in English

*In all three countries you said you were in favour of openness: openness regarding migrants, openness regarding the other. But, for example, in Lithuania there was a confrontation about the case of a girl whom you greeted upon your landing, in front of the plane: she did not have an expressly Lithuanian appearance. She was part Italian, with olive skin.... My question is: do people in the Baltic countries hear only what they want to hear from you, or do they hear what you are trying to tell them? Do they hear your message about openness?*

**Pope Francis:**

The message about openness to migrants is rather advanced in your people; there are no blazing populists, no. In Estonia and Latvia too they are open people who want to integrate migrants, but not massively, because you cannot. Integrate them with governmental prudence. We spoke about this with two of the three heads of state, and they broached the subject, not I. And in the

Presidents' addresses, you will see that the word "welcome", "openness" is frequent. This indicates a wish for universality, to the extent possible, for space, work, and so on; to the extent that you can integrate – this is very important – and to the extent that your own identity is not threatened. They are three things that I understand about the migration of people. And this really touched me: prudent and well thought-out openness. I do not know if you are thinking of something else.

### **Edvardas SPOKAS**

My question is about how your message was received.

### **Pope Francis:**

I think so. In this sense that I have mentioned. Because today, the issue of migrants throughout the world – and not just external migration, but also within the continents – is a serious problem. It is not easy to study it. In every country, in every location, in every place it has different connotations.

### **Greg Burke:**

Thank you, Holy Father; we have finished with the questions about the journey.

### **Pope Francis:**

Very well. I would like to tell you something about several points of the journey that I experienced with a special force.

The fact of your history, of the *history of the Baltic countries*: a history of invasions, of dictatorships, of crimes, of deportations.... [When I visited the Museum in Vilnius](#): 'museum' is a word that makes me think of the Louvre.... No. That Museum is a prison. It is a prison to which inmates were taken, for political or religious reasons. And I saw cells the size of this seat, where you could only stare at your feet, torture chambers. I saw places for torture where, with the cold there is in Lithuania, they took the prisoners naked and threw water on them, and they stayed there for hours and hours, to break down their resistance. And then I entered the room, the great execution room. The prisoners were taken there by force and killed with a blow to the neck; then they were sent out on a conveyor belt and loaded onto a truck that tossed them into the forest. They killed more or less 40 of them a day. In the end there were about 15,000 of them killed there. This is part of Lithuania's history, but also of the other countries. Then I went to the site of the Great Ghetto, where thousands of Jews were killed. Then, the same afternoon, I went to the Monument to the memory of those who were condemned, killed, tortured, deported. That day – I'll tell you the truth – I was destroyed: it made me think about the cruelty. But I tell you that, based on

the information we have today, the cruelty is not over. The same cruelty is found today in many detention sites; today it is found in many prisons; even the overpopulation of prison is a system of torture, a manner of living without dignity. Today, a prison that does not plan to give the inmate a prospect of hope, is already torture. Then we have seen, on television, the cruelty of ISIS terrorists: that Jordanian pilot burned alive, those Coptic Christians whose throats were slit on the beach in Libya, and many others. Today the cruelty has not ended. It exists all over the world. And I would like to convey this message to you, as journalists: this is a scandal, a serious scandal of our culture and our society.

Another thing I saw in these three countries is *[the past regime's] hatred for religion*, whichever it may be. Hatred. I saw a Jesuit Bishop, in Lithuania or Latvia, I do not remember well, who had been deported to Siberia for 10 years, then to another concentration camp.... Now he is elderly, smiling.... So many men and women, for defending their faith, which was their identity, were tortured and deported to Siberia, and never returned; or they were killed. The faith of these three countries is great; it is a faith born precisely from martyrdom, and this is something you have seen, speaking with the people, as you journalists do, to have news about the country.

Moreover, this experience of such important faith produced a unique phenomenon in these countries: an *ecumenical life* like there is in no others, so generalized. There is true ecumenism: ecumenism among Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans and also Orthodox. In the cathedral yesterday, at the ecumenical meeting in Riga, Latvia, we saw it: a remarkable thing; brothers and sisters, neighbours, together in one church..., neighbours. Ecumenism has put its roots there.

Then, there is another phenomenon in these countries that is important to study, and perhaps you can do many good things in your profession, by studying this: the phenomenon of the *transmission of culture, of identity and of faith*. Ordinarily, the transmission has been by grandparents. Why? Because fathers worked, fathers and mothers had to work, and they had to be involved in the party – both in the Soviet and in the Nazi regimes – and also educated in atheism. But the grandparents were able to pass on the faith and the culture. At the time that in Lithuania the use of the Lithuanian language was forbidden, it was removed from the schools, when they went to the religious service – whether Protestant or Catholic – they picked up the prayer books to see if they in Lithuanian or Russian or German. And many – a generation in that era – learned the mother tongue from their grandparents: it was the grandparents who taught how to write and read the mother tongue. This makes us think, and some article would be nice, some television service on the transmission of culture, of language, of art, of faith in times of dictatorship and persecution. One could not think otherwise, because all means of communication, which at that time were few – radio – were held by the state. When a government becomes, seeks to become dictatorial, the first thing it does is take the means of communication in hand.

I wanted to emphasize these things.

And now, I refer to today's meeting with young people. Young people are scandalized: here I will introduce the first question that had strayed from the topic of the trip. Young people are scandalized by the hypocrisy of older adults. They are scandalized by war; they are scandalized by contradiction; they are scandalized by corruption. And included in this corruption is what you highlighted, sexual abuse. It is true that there is an accusation against the Church, and we all know, we know the statistics, I will not state them here. But even had there been only a single priest who abused a boy or a girl, this would still be monstrous, because that man was chosen by God to lead that child to heaven. I understand that young people are scandalized about this, such large-scale corruption. They know that it is everywhere, but in the Church it is more scandalous, because we are supposed to lead the children to God, not destroy them. Young people try to make their way through experience. In the meeting with young people today it was very clear: they ask to be listened to; they ask for listening. They do not want fixed formulas. They do not want directorial support. And the second part of this question, which was the first one beyond the scope of the journey, was that "the Church is not doing what she should in this matter, in cleaning up this corruption". I'll take the Pennsylvania report, for example, and we see that until the early 1970s there were many priests who had fallen into this corruption. Then, in more recent times, they decreased because the Church realized that she had to *grapple* in another way. In times past, these things were covered up. They were also covered up in the home, when an uncle molested a niece, when a father molested his children: it was covered up, because it was a terrible disgrace. It was the way they thought in previous centuries, and in the last century. In this there is a principle that really helps me to interpret history: a historical fact should be interpreted with the hermeneutic of the time in which this fact occurred, not with today's hermeneutic. For example: indigence. There have been many injustices, many atrocities. But they cannot be interpreted with a present day hermeneutic, when we have a different awareness. A final example: the death penalty. Even the Vatican, as a state, when it was a Pontifical state, had the death penalty; the last one, a criminal, a young man, was beheaded in around 1870. But then moral consciousness grew; the moral conscience grew.

It is true that there are always loopholes; there are always hidden death sentences: you are old, you are bothersome, I will not give you medicine ..., and then they say "he passed away". It is a modern social death sentence. But I think with this I have responded. The Church: I take the example of Pennsylvania, you see the proportions and you see when the Church began to take notice of this, she put everything there. And in recent times I have received many, many convictions issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and I have said: "Continue, continue". After a conviction I have never, never signed a request for clemency. This is not negotiable; there is no negotiation.

**Greg Burke:**

Antonio Pelayo, "*Vida nueva*" Antena 3 (Spain):

**Antonio Pelayo:**

Holy Father, three days ago an Agreement was signed between the Holy See and the government of the People's Republic of China. Can you give us some additional information about this, about its content? Because some Chinese Catholics, in particular Cardinal Zen, accuse you of selling out the Church to the Communist government of Beijing, after many years of suffering. How do you respond to this accusation?

**Pope Francis:**

This has been a years-long process, a dialogue between the Vatican Commission and the Chinese Commission, to find a solution concerning the appointment of bishops. The Vatican team worked very hard. I would like to mention a few names: Msgr Celli, who patiently went, dialogued, returned ... for years, years! Then, Msgr Rota Graziosi, a humble 72-year member of the Curia who wished to be a parish priest but remained in the Curia to help with this process. And then, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, who is a very devoted man, and has a particular attachment to the magnifying glass: he studies every document down to the period, comma, accent mark.... And this gives me a great deal of certitude. And this team, with these qualities, made progress. You know that when a peace agreement is sought or negotiation is undertaken, both sides lose something, this is the rule. Both sides. And progress is made. This process went like this: two steps forward, one back, two forward, one back...; then months passed without talking, and then.... They are God's times, which resemble Chinese time: slowly.... This is wisdom, the wisdom of the Chinese. The situations of the bishops who were in difficulty were studied on a case by case basis, and in the end the dossiers arrived on my desk, and I was the one responsible for signing, in the case of the bishops. As for the Agreement, the drafts came across my desk, they were discussed, I shared my ideas, the others debated and they went ahead. I think about the resistance, of the Catholics who have suffered: it is true, they will suffer. There is always suffering with an agreement. But they have great faith and they write, they send messages, affirming that what the Holy See says, what Peter says, is what Jesus says: that is, the "martyrial" faith of these people moves forward today. They are great. And the Agreement that I signed, the Letters Plenipotentiary for the signing of that Agreement. I am responsible. The others, whom I appointed, have worked for over 10 years. It is not an improvisation: it is a journey, a true journey.

And then, a simple anecdote and a historical fact, two things before ending. When that famous 'communiqué' was released by a former Apostolic Nuncio, the episcopates of the world wrote to me, saying that they felt close, that they were praying for me; Chinese faithful also wrote, and the signature on this text was that of the bishop – so to speak – of the traditional Chinese Catholic Church and of the Patriotic Church: together, both of them, and the faithful of both Churches. For me, this was a sign of God. And the second thing: we forget that in Latin America – thank God this has been overcome! – we forget that for 350 years it was the kings of Portugal and Spain who nominated bishops. And the Pope gave only jurisdiction. We forget the case of the Austro-

Hungarian Empire: Maria Teresa got tired of signing bishops' appointments, and gave the jurisdiction to the Vatican. Other eras, thank God, that are not repeated! But the current case is not for the appointment: it is a dialogue about potential candidates. The matter is carried out through dialogue. But the appointment is by Rome; the appointment is by the Pope. This is clear. And we pray for the suffering of some who do not understand or who have many years of clandestine existence behind them.

I thank you very much! They tell us that dinner is ready and the flight is not long. Thank you very much! Thank you very much for your work. And pray for me.

**Greg Burke:**

Thank you, Holy Father. Enjoy your dinner and rest well.