



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to MARSEILLE

for the conclusion of the “Rencontres Méditerranéennes”

[22 - 23 september 2023]

IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE

Papal flight

Saturday, 23 September 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Matteo Bruni – Director of the Holy See Press Office

Good evening, Your Holiness, good evening everyone. Thank you for taking this time on our return flight. It was a special journey in which you were also able to feel, as His Eminence said, all the affection of the French people who came to pray with you. But I think there are still a few questions or issues that the journalists would like to ask you. Perhaps you would like to say a few words to us.

Pope Francis

Good evening and thank you very much for your work. Before I forget I want to say two things. Today, I think, is the final flight of Roberto Bellino [Sound Engineer with the Dicastery for Communication], because he is retiring (applause). Thank you, thank you, thank you! The second thing is that today is Rino's birthday, the marvelous Rino [Anastasio, ITA Airways coordinator of papal journeys] (applause). Now you may ask your questions.

Raphaële Schapira (France TV)

Your Holiness, good evening. You began your pontificate in Lampedusa, denouncing indifference. Ten years later you are asking Europe to show solidarity. You have been repeating the same message for ten years. Does that mean you have failed?

I would say no. I would say that growth has been slow. Today there is an awareness of the migration problem. We are aware of it. And also, there is an awareness of how it has reached a point ... like a hot potato that you don't know how to handle.

Angela Merkel once said that it will be solved by going to Africa and solving it in Africa, by raising the level of African peoples. But there have been cases that are bad. Very bad cases, where migrants, like in ping pong, have been sent back. And we know that many times they end up in lagers; they end up worse than before.

I was following the life of a boy, Mahmoud, who was trying to get out... and in the end he hanged himself. He didn't make it because he couldn't stand this torture. I had mentioned reading the book *Little Brother - Hermanito*. The people who come are sold, first. Then they take away their money. Then they make them call their family on the phone to send more money. These poor people! It's a terrible life.

I heard from someone who was a witness that, at night, when boarding a boat, he saw just a simple vessel, with no security and he did not want to board. And, "boom boom". End of story. It is the reign of terror. They suffer not only because they need to get out, but because it is the reign of terror there. They are slaves. And we cannot, without seeing these things, send them back like a ping pong ball. No.

That is why I would reiterate this principle: migrants should be welcomed, accompanied, promoted and integrated. If you cannot integrate them in your country, accompany and integrate them in other countries, but do not leave them in the hands of these cruel human traffickers.

The tragedy with migrants is this: that we send them back and they fall into the hands of these wretched people who do so much evil. They sell them; they exploit them. People try to flee. There are some groups of people who devote themselves to rescuing people at sea. I invited one of them, the head of *Mediterranea Saving Humans*, to participate in the Synod. They tell you terrible stories.

On my first Journey, as you said, I went to Lampedusa. Things have gotten better. They really have. There is more awareness nowadays. Back then we didn't know. Back then they didn't tell us the truth. I remember there was a receptionist in Santa Marta, an Ethiopian, daughter of Ethiopians. She spoke the language, and followed my journey on the TV. At Lampedusa, there

was someone, a poor Ethiopian, who was explaining the tortures and these things to me. And the translator – this lady told me – didn't say everything; he "sweetened" the situation. It is difficult to trust. So many tragedies...

The day I was there a doctor told me: "Look at that woman". She was walking among the corpses looking at the faces because she was searching for her daughter. She didn't find her. These tragedies...it is good for us to hold on to these realities. It will make us more human and therefore also more divine. This is a call. I wish it were like a cry: "Let us pay attention. Let us do something!"

Awareness has changed. It really has. Today we are more aware. Not because I spoke out, but because people have become aware of the problem. So many are talking about it.

That was my first Journey and I heard something inside. I did not even know where Lampedusa was, but I heard stories, I read something, and in prayer I heard: "You must go there", as if the Lord had brought me there, on my first Journey. Thank you.

Clément Melki – Agence France-Presse (AFP)

Good evening, Holy Father. This morning you met with Emmanuel Macron after expressing your disagreement with regard to euthanasia. The French government is preparing to pass a controversial end-of-life law. Could you kindly tell us what you told the French president about this and whether you think you can change his mind. Thank you.

We did not speak on this issue today, but we talked about it on the other visit when we met. I spoke clearly when he came to the Vatican and I told him my clear view: life is not to be played with, neither at the beginning nor at the end. We cannot play around. This is not my opinion: this is protecting life! Because then we wind up with a policy of "no pain", of a humanistic euthanasia.

On this point, I want to repeat my invitation to read a book, a novel from 1907, called *Lord of the World* or *Lord of the Earth* – it has two titles – written by [Robert Hugh] Benson. It's an apocalyptic novel that shows how things will be at the end. All differences are taken away, including all pain. Euthanasia is one of these things – a gentle death, selection before birth. It shows us how this man had foreseen some of the current conflicts.

Today we should be careful about ideological colonizations that ruin and go against human life. Today, for example, the lives of grandparents are erased, and when human wealth comes into play in the dialogue with grandchildren, they are erased. They are old, so are of no use. We cannot play with life.

This time I did not talk to the president [about this topic], but last time I did. When he came, I gave

him my view that life is not something to be played with. Whether it's a law that does not allow the baby to grow in the mother's womb or the law that allows euthanasia in disease or old age. I'm not saying this is an issue of faith. It's a human issue, a human issue. We are dealing with an ugly kind of compassion. Science has been able to make some painful diseases less painful, accompanying them with many medicines. But life must not be played with.

Javier Martínez-Brocal – ABC

Holy Father, thank you for taking the time to answer our questions, for this very intense trip, rich in content. Up to the end you spoke about Ukraine and the situation there. Cardinal Zuppi has just returned from Beijing. Is there any progress in this mission? At least on the humanitarian issue of the return of the children? Then a somewhat harsh question: how do you personally experience the fact that this mission has not managed to obtain any concrete results so far. In an audience you spoke of frustration. Do you feel frustration? Thank you.

That is true, there is some frustration, because the Secretariat of State is doing everything it can to help in this matter, and even the "Zuppi mission" has gone there. There is something with the children that is going well, but this war makes me think that there are other interests at work beyond the Russian/Ukrainian problem: the selling of arms, the arms trade. Someone told me a few months ago that today the investments that provide the most income are arms factories, that is, factories of death.

The Ukrainian people is a war-torn people that has a very war-torn history, a history that makes them suffer. This is not the first time: at the time of Stalin, they suffered a lot, a lot; they are a long-suffering people. But we must not toy with the martyrdom of this people; we have to help them resolve things in the most realistic way possible.

In wars, what is realistic is what is possible, not having illusions that tomorrow the two leaders at war would go out to eat together. As far as what is possible, that is where we will go. With humility, but doing what is possible. Now I have seen that some countries are pulling back, that they are not giving arms: this begins a process where the martyr will certainly be the Ukrainian people. And that is a bad thing.

Before I conclude, I want to go back to your first point, the Journey. Marseille is a civilization of many cultures, many cultures. It is a port of migrants.

At one time there were migrants to Cayenne [in French Guiana – ed.], those condemned to prison left from the port for Cayenne - the Archbishop [of Marseille - ed.] gave me *Manon Lescaut* to remind me of that history. But Marseille is a culture of encounter. As we saw yesterday in the meeting with the representatives of different religions – they live together: Muslims, Jews, Christians, but there is also coexistence, it is a culture of assistance. Marseille is a creative

mosaic; it is this culture of creativity. A port that is a message in Europe: Marseille is welcoming. It welcomes, respects and creates a synthesis without denying the identity of peoples. We have to rethink this issue for other places: the capacity to do all this.

Returning to migrants, there are five countries that suffer due to the arrival of so many migrants, but in some of these countries, there are empty towns. I think of a specific case I know of, there is a town where fewer than 20 elderly people are living there and no more! Please let these towns make the effort to integrate.

We need labour; Europe needs it. Well-conducted migration is a source of wealth; it is a source of wealth. Let us think a little about migration policy so that it can be more fruitful and can help us very much.

Since this is a brief trip, now comes dinner and the celebration for Rino's birthday and Roberto's farewell. Let's stop here. Thank you very much! Thank you very much for your work and your questions. And onward to the next flight!