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Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father Francis in Budapest for the concluding Holy Mass of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress, and in Slovakia (12-15 September 2021 – Private visit to the “Bethlehem Centre” in Bratislava and meeting with the Jewish Community in Rybné námestie Square

Private visit to the “Bethlehem Centre” in Bratislava

Meeting with the Jewish Community in Rybné námestie Square

Visit of the President of the Parliament and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic at the Apostolic Nunciature

Private visit to the “Bethlehem Centre” in Bratislava

In the afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the apostolic nunciature and transferred by car to the “Bethlehem Centre” in Bratislava where, shortly after 16.00, he paid a private visit. Before arriving at the centre, the Pope met with Archbishop Róbert Bezák, C.S.R., emeritus of Trnava, with his family.

At the “Bethlehem Centre”, the Pope was welcomed by the Superior of the Centre who showed him some of the rooms in the facility. The Centre accommodates the homeless who are cared for by the Sisters of the Congregation of Mother Teresa. Pope Francis spoke with thirty people who have lived on the streets, some of whom are sick or disabled and now cared for by the Sisters, and with other guests of the House. In the courtyard of the Centre, a children’s choir sang hymns.

Before leaving the “Bethlehem Centre”, the Holy Father recited the Hail Mary with those present, presented them with a gift and concluded the meeting with a blessing. He then moved by car to Rybné námestie Square for the meeting with the Jewish Community.

The following are the Pope’s impromptu words, spoken during his private visit:

Words of the Holy Father

Good evening to all of you!

I am happy to visit you and to be with you. Thank you for having me!

I very much thank the Sisters for the work they do in welcoming, assisting and accompanying others. Many thanks! I thank the mothers and fathers, who are here with their children; and I thank all the young ones for their presence. The Lord is also with us; whenever we are together, so happy, the Lord is with us. But he is also with us at times of difficulty. The Lord never abandons us; he is always with us. We can see him and we cannot see him. Yet he always accompanies us along our life's journey. Don't ever forget this, especially when times are hard. Thank you, thank you so much!

Meeting with the Jewish Community in Rybné námestie Square

At 16.50 this afternoon, the Holy Father Francis met with the Jewish Community in Rybné námestie Square in Bratislava.

Upon arrival, the Pope was received by the president of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic, Mr. Richard Duda.

After the greeting from the president of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities and testimonies from a Holocaust survivor and a religious sister, Pope Francis delivered his address.

At the end of the meeting, the Holy Father returned by car to the apostolic nunciature.

The following is the address given by the Pope during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good evening! I thank you for your kind words of welcome and for the testimonies you have offered. I have come as a pilgrim, to visit this place and be moved by it. This Square is a highly meaningful place for your community. It keeps alive the memory of a rich history. For centuries it was part of the Jewish quarter. Here the celebrated rabbi Chatam Sofer laboured. Here a synagogue stood alongside the Cathedral of the Coronation. The architectural setting, as we heard, was an expression of the peaceful coexistence of the two communities, an unusual and evocative symbol, and a striking sign of unity in the name of the God of our fathers. Here, like so many of them, I too feel the desire to "remove my sandals" in a place blessed by human fraternity in the name of the Most High.

In later times, however, God's name was dishonoured: in a frenzy of hatred, during the Second World War more than a hundred thousand Slovak Jews were killed. In an effort to eradicate every trace of the community, the

synagogue was demolished. It is written: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (*Ex 20:7*). The divine Name, the Lord himself, is blasphemed whenever the unique and distinctive dignity of the human person, created in his image, is violated. Here, in this place, the Name of God was dishonoured, for the worst form of blasphemy is to exploit it for our own purposes, refusing to respect and love others. Here, reflecting on the history of the Jewish people marked by this tragic affront to the Most High, we admit with shame how often his ineffable Name has been used for unspeakable acts of inhumanity! How many oppressors have said: “God is with us”; yet it was they, who were not with God!

Dear brothers and sisters, your history is our history, your sufferings are our sufferings. For some of you, this Memorial of the *Shoah* is the only place where you can honour the memory of your loved ones. I join with you in this. The word “*zechor*” – “Remember!” – is inscribed in Hebrew on this Memorial. Memory cannot and must not give way to forgetfulness, for there will be no lasting dawn of fraternity unless we have first shared and dispelled the darkness of the night. For us too, the prophet’s question echoes: “Watchman, what of the night?” (*Is 21:11*). Now is the time when the image of God shining forth in humanity must **not** be obscured. Let us help one another in this effort. For in our day too, so many empty and false idols dishonour the Name of the Most High: the idols of power and money that prevail over human dignity; a spirit of indifference that looks the other way; and forms of manipulation that would exploit religion in the service of power or else reduce it to irrelevance. But also forgetfulness of the past, ignorance prepared to justify anything, anger and hatred. I repeat: let us unite in condemning all violence and every form of anti-Semitism, and in working to ensure that God’s image, present in the humanity he created, will never be profaned.

This Square, dear brothers and sisters, is also a place where the light of hope shines forth. Each year you come here during Hanukkah to light the first lamp on the menorah. Darkness is dispelled by the message that destruction and death do not have the last word, but rather renewal and life. Though the synagogue on this site was torn down, the community remains present. A community alive and open to dialogue. In this place, our histories meet once more. Here let us affirm together before God our willingness to persevere on the path of rapprochement and friendship.

I have vivid memories of my 2017 meeting in Rome with representatives of your Jewish and Christian communities. I am pleased to say that afterwards a Commission for dialogue with the Catholic Church was established and that together you have published several significant documents. It is good to share and make known the things that unite us. And it is good to advance, in truth and honesty, along the fraternal path of a purification of memory, to heal past wounds and to remember the good received and offered. According to the *Talmud*, whoever destroys a single individual destroys the whole world, while whoever saves a single individual saves the whole world. Every individual matters, and what you are doing through your important exchanges matters greatly. I thank you for the doors you have opened on both sides.

Our world needs open doors. They are signs of blessing for humanity. God said to Father Abraham: “By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (*Gen 12:3*). This is a recurring theme throughout the lives of the Patriarchs (cf. *Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4*). To Jacob, Israel, God said: “Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves” (*Gen 28:14*). Here in this land of Slovakia, a land of encounter between east and west, north and south, may the family of the children of Israel continue to foster this vocation, the summons to be a sign of blessing for all the families of the earth. The blessing of the Most High is poured out upon us, whenever he sees a family of brothers and sisters who respect and love each other and work together. May the Almighty bless you, so that, amid all the discord that defiles our world, you may always be, together, witnesses of peace. *Shalom!*

Visit of the President of the Parliament and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic at the Apostolic Nunciature

In the afternoon, in the representation hall of the apostolic nunciature in Bratislava, the Holy Father Francis met the President of the Parliament of Slovakia, Mr. Boris Kollár, and then the Prime Minister of the country, Mr.

Eduard Heger. The two meetings ended shortly after 18.30.
