



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF FÁTIMA

on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Apparitions
of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Cova da Iria
(12-13 May 2017)

IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FROM FATIMA TO ROME

*Papal flight
Saturday, 13 May 2017*

[Multimedia]

Greg Burke

Thank you, Your Holiness. It has been a very intense twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hours dedicated to Our Lady. The Portuguese were very moved when you said: “We have a Mother”. You feel this in a very personal way. A hundred years ago, Our Lady did not appear to three important journalists but to three shepherd children. Yet we have seen how they, in their simplicity and holiness, were able to “get her message out” to the whole world. Journalists too have a message to get out, and we see this in the great number of countries they come from. They are very keen to know about your journey. If you wish to say something first...

Pope Francis

First of all, good evening. Thank you. I would like to answer as many questions as possible; so, we'll do things quite quickly. I don't like it when we are only half way through, and they come to tell us that it is already time for the snack... so let's do both things together. Thank you.

Greg Burke

Let's start with the Portuguese group, with Fátima Campos Ferreira, of Portuguese Radio and Television (*Rádio e Televisão de Portugal*).

Fátima Campos Ferreira

It feels somewhat odd to be sitting down in front of the Holy Father. Well, first, many thanks for your journey. Holy Father, you came to Fatima as a pilgrim in order to canonize Francisco and Jacinta in the centenary year of the apparitions. From this historical standpoint, what remains now for the Church and for the whole world? Also, Fatima has a message of peace, and the Holy Father is going to receive in the Vatican in coming days – on 24 May – the American President Donald Trump. What can the world hope for from this meeting, and what does the Holy Father hope for from this meeting? Thank you very much.

Pope Francis

That Fatima has a message of peace, certainly. And it was brought to humanity by three great communicators who were less than 13 years old. That is interesting. That I came as a pilgrim, yes. That the canonization was not something planned at the beginning, because the procedure involving the miracle was still underway, but suddenly the expert opinions proved positive and things quickly moved forward... and so things came together. For me it was a great joy. What can the world hope for? For peace. And what am I going to speak of to everyone from now on...? Peace.

Fátima Campos Ferreira

What remains for the Church and for the world from that historical moment?

Pope Francis

A message of peace. And I would like to say something which touched my heart. Before leaving, I received some scientists of various religions who were doing research at the Vatican Observatory at Castel Gandolfo. Some were agnostic or atheists. An atheist said to me: "I am an atheist"; he didn't say what nationality he was or where he came from. He spoke in English, so I couldn't tell and I didn't ask him. "I ask you a favour: tell Christians that they must love Muslims more". That is a message of peace.

Fátima Campos Ferreira

Is that what you are going to say to Trump?

Pope Francis

[smiles]

Greg Burke

And now Aura Miguel.

Aura Miguel

May I ask my question in Portuguese or Italian?

Pope Francis

Italian would be better.

Aura Miguel

So, Holy Father, in Fatima you presented yourself as “the Bishop dressed in white”. Until now, this expression has applied rather to the vision of the third part of the secret, to Saint John Paul II and to the martyrs of the twentieth century. What does it mean that you identify yourself with this expression?

Pope Francis

Yes, in the prayer. I didn't do that myself; the Shrine did it. But I also wondered why they said that. And there is a connection, about the white: the bishop dressed in white, Our Lady dressed in white, the radiance of children's innocence after being baptized... There is a connection, in that prayer, with the colour white. I think – because I didn't do it – I think that on a literal level they were trying to express by the colour white the desire for innocence, for peace: innocence, not doing evil to another, not making war...

Aura Miguel

Is the interpretation of the message being revised?

Pope Francis

No. That vision... I think that Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, explained everything quite clearly. Thank you.

Greg Burke

The next question is from Claudio Lavagna of NBC, here at the right.

Claudio Lavagna of NBC

Hello, Holy Father. Yesterday you asked the faithful to knock down all walls. And yet, on 24 May you are meeting a Head of State who threatens to build walls, something rather contrary to your words. But he also has – so it seems – other opinions and decisions differing from your own, for example, on the need to take action in the face of global warming or on the welcoming of refugees. So, on the eve of this visit, what opinion have you formed of the policies that President Trump has adopted so far on these questions, and what are you expecting from a meeting with a Head of State who seems to think and act in a way contrary to your own?

Pope Francis

Well, the first question is – but I can respond to both of them – I never make a judgment about people without hearing them first. It is something I feel I should not do. When we speak to each other, things will come out. I will say what I think; he will say what he thinks. But I have never, ever, wanted to make a judgment without hearing the person. And the second is, what do I think...

Claudio Lavagna

...what do you think especially about questions such as the welcoming of refugees...

Pope Francis

But this you know quite well!

Claudio Lavagna

The second thing is really: what do you expect from a meeting with a Head of State who thinks differently than yourself.

Pope Francis

There are always doors that are not closed. We have to find doors that are at least a little open, in order to go in and speak about things we have in common and go forward. Step by step. Peace is something crafted: it is made daily. So too with friendship between people, mutual knowledge. Esteem is crafted; it is worked on each day. Respect for the other, saying what we think, but with respect, walking together... Someone sees things in a certain way: say so, be honest in what each of us thinks.

Claudio Lavagna

You hope that he will soften his decisions afterwards...

Pope Francis

This is a political calculation that I do not permit myself to make. Even in the religious sphere, I am not a proselytizer. Thank you.

Greg Burke

Thank you, Holiness. And now here is Elisabetta Piqué.

Elisabetta Piqué, *La Nación*

Thank you, first of all, for this brief and very intense journey. I wanted to ask you: today is the centenary of the apparitions of the Virgin of Fatima, but it is also the important anniversary of something in your own life. Twenty-five years ago, the Nuncio [Archbishop] Calabresi told you that you would become the Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires, something that meant the end of your exile to Cordoba and a big change in your life. My question is whether you have ever connected this fact that changed your life to the Virgin of Fatima? And if, in these days when you prayed before her, you thought about this, and what you can tell us about it. Thank you.

Pope Francis

[with a laugh] Women know everything! I hadn't thought about the coincidence; just yesterday, while I was praying in front of Our Lady, I realized that it was on 13 May that I received the phone call from the Nuncio, twenty-five years ago. Yes. I don't know... I said: "Look at me!"... And I spoke with Our Lady a little about this; I asked her forgiveness for all my mistakes, but also for her own poor taste in choosing people... [laughing]. But I did realize this yesterday.

Greg Burke

Nicholas Senèze, of *La Croix*.

Nicholas Senèze

Thank you, Holy Father. May we go back to Fatima, to which the Fraternity of Saint Pius X has great devotion. We hear much said about an agreement that would give official status in the Church to the Fraternity. Some even imagined that this announcement could have been made today. Your Holiness, do you think that this agreement will be possible in the short term? And what obstacles still remain? And what is the meaning of this reconciliation for you? Will it be a triumphal return of the faithful who will show what it means to truly be Catholic, or something else?

Pope Francis

Well, I would reject any form of triumphalism, no? Some days ago, the *feria quarta* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith... their meeting – they call it *feria quarta* because it takes place on Wednesdays – studied a document, and the document, their study of the document, has not yet reached me. This is the first thing. Second: relations currently are fraternal. Last year I granted faculties for confession for them all, even a form of jurisdiction for marriages. But first, too, the problems, the cases they had – for example – that needed to be resolved by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith... that Congregation has been working on them. For example, abuse, cases of abuse. They brought them to us, also to the Apostolic Penitentiary, also for the reduction of priests to the lay state, they brought those to us... Relations are fraternal. I have a good relationship with Monsignor Fellay; I have spoken [with him] several times... I don't like to rush things. Walking, walk, walk, and then we will see. For me it is not a question of winners or losers, no. It is a problem of brothers who have to walk together, seeking the way to take steps forward.

Greg Burke

Thank you, Holiness. And now Tassilo Forchheimer of *ARD*.

Tassilo Forchheimer

Holy Father, on the anniversary of the Reformation, can Evangelical and Catholic Christians walk another stretch of the road together? Will there be the possibility of participating at the same Eucharistic Table? Some months ago, Cardinal Kasper said that it might be possible to take a further step forward in the course of this year...

Pope Francis

Great steps forward have been taken! We can think of the first Declaration on Justification: from that moment, the journey has not stopped. The visit to Sweden was very meaningful, because it was the beginning [of the commemorations], and also a commemoration with Sweden. There too, [it was] meaningful for the ecumenism of journeying, of journeying together in prayer, in martyrdom and in works of charity, together with works of mercy. And there the Lutheran *Caritas* and the Catholic *Caritas* made an agreement to work together: this is a big step! But other steps are awaited, always. You know that God is the God of surprises. Yet we must never stop, but always go forward. Praying together, bearing witness together, carrying out works of mercy together, which is to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ, to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, the one Saviour, and that grace comes only from him... And about this journey the theologians will continue their study, but we must keep walking. With a heart open to surprises...

Greg Burke

Thank you, Holiness. Now we have Mimmo Muolo of Avvenire.

Mimmo Muolo

Good evening, Your Holiness. Let me ask you a question in the name of the Italian group. Yesterday and today at Fatima we saw with you a great testimony to popular faith. The same faith is found, for example, at other Marian Shrines too such as Medjugorje. What do you think about those apparitions – if there were apparitions – and about the religious fervour they have evoked, seeing that you have decided to name a bishop delegate for the pastoral aspects? And if I may be permitted a second question, which I know is close to your heart, as well as for us Italians. NGOs have been accused of collusion with smugglers, human traffickers. What do you think about this? Thank you.

Pope Francis

I'll start with the second one. I read in the newspaper that I page through in the morning that there was this problem, but I also do not know what the details might be. So I cannot offer an opinion. I know that there is a problem and that investigations are under way. I hope that they continue and that the whole truth comes out. The first? Medjugorje. All apparitions or presumed apparitions belong to the private sphere; they do not form part of the public ordinary magisterium of the Church. As for Medjugorje, a commission was set up headed by Cardinal Ruini. Benedict XVI set it up. At the end of 2013 or the beginning of 2014, I received the results from Cardinal Ruini. The commission was made up of good theologians, bishops and cardinals. Good, good, good people. The Ruini report is very, very good. Then, there were some doubts at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Congregation judged it appropriate to send each member of the *feria quarta* meeting the entire documentation, even the things that seemed contrary to the Ruini report. I was notified about this; I recall that it was late on a Saturday evening. It didn't seem right to me; it was like putting the Ruini report up for auction – sorry for this word – a report which had been done very well. On Sunday morning, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith received a letter from me, in which I asked him to tell them that instead of sending their opinions to the *quarta feria*, they should send them to me personally. These opinions were studied, and all of them stress how substantial the Ruini report was. Yes, mainly, three things need to be distinguished. About the first apparitions, when [the “seers”] were young, the report more or less says that the investigation needs to continue. Concerning the alleged current apparitions, the report expresses doubts. Personally, I am more “mischievous”: I prefer Our Lady to be a Mother, our Mother, and not a telegraph operator who sends out a message every day at a certain time... this is not the mother of Jesus. And these alleged apparitions have no great value. I say this as my personal opinion. Who thinks that Our Lady would say: “Come tomorrow at this time and I will give a message to that seer”; no. [In the Ruini report] a distinction is made between

the two apparitions. Third, the real core of the Ruini report: the spiritual fact, the pastoral fact, the people go there and are converted, the people who meet God, who change their lives... For this there is no magic wand, this spiritual-pastoral fact cannot be denied. Now, in order to look at matters with all these findings, with the responses sent to me by the theologians, a Bishop has been named – a good one, good because he is experienced – in order to take a look at how the pastoral part is going. And at the end, something will be said.

Mimmo Muolo

Your Holiness, thank you also for your blessing to my fellow citizens who thank you: they saw this, and were very happy.

Pope Francis

Thank you.

Greg Burke

Your Holiness, now if may I be “mischievous” ... we have heard from all the language groups, and it is now six o'clock...

Pope Francis

Ah, there's still time...

Greg Burke

There is a question...

Pope Francis

One or two...

Greg Burke

Joshua McElwee of *The National Catholic Reporter*.

Joshua McElwee

Thank you, Holy Father. My question: the last member of the Commission for the Protection of Minors, who was abused by a priest, resigned in March. Mrs Marie Collins said that she had to resign because the Vatican officials were not implementing the guidelines of the Commission that

you, Holy Father, had approved. I have two questions. Whose responsibility is this? And what are you doing, Holy Father, to ensure that the priests and bishops in the Vatican carry out your recommendations, as advised by your Commission?

Pope Francis

Right. Marie Collins explained things to me clearly. I spoke to her: she is a good woman. She continues to work in formation with priests on this point. She is a good woman, who wants to work. She made this accusation, and to some extent she is right. Why? Because there are many delayed cases, because they have been piling up... And in this period of time, legislation had to be enacted for this: what must diocesan bishops do? Today in almost all dioceses there is a procedure to follow in these cases: that is a significant step forward. In this way, the dossiers are done properly. This is one step. Another step: there are few personnel, there is need for more people capable of doing this, and the Secretary of State is seeking to present new personnel, as is Cardinal Müller. The other day two or three more were taken on. The head of the disciplinary section was changed; he was good, very good, but rather weary. He has returned to his homeland to do the same work with his episcopate. And the new one – he is Irish, Monsignor Kennedy – is a very good person, very efficient, swift, and this helps a great deal. Then there is another thing. Sometimes the Bishops send [cases]. If the case is properly instructed, then it goes immediately to the *feria quarta* meeting; the *feria quarta* studies it and then makes a decision. If the case is not well instructed, then it has to be sent back and be redone. For this, we are thinking of providing continent-wide assistance, one or two per continent. For example, in Latin America, one in Colombia, another in Brazil... They would be continental pre-tribunals or tribunals. But this is in the planning stage. And then, things work well: the *feria quarta* studies [the case] and removes the priest from the clerical state; he then returns to the diocese and appeals. Previously, the recourse was studied by the same *feria quarta* which had pronounced the sentence, but this is unjust. I created another tribunal and put someone beyond question in charge of it: Archbishop Scicluna of Malta, who is one of the most outspoken against cases of abuse. And in this second tribunal – because we must be fair – anyone who appeals has the right to a defender. If this [second tribunal] approves the first sentence, the case is over. All that remains is [the possibility of writing] a letter asking the Pope for clemency. I have never signed a pardon. So as things stand, we are moving forward. Marie Collins on that point was right; but we, too, were making progress. But there are two thousand cases piled up! Thank you.

Greg Burke

Your Holiness, but now we must go...

Pope Francis

But who was the one who was waiting?

Greg Burke

A Portuguese...

Pope Francis

Oh yes, poor thing...

Greg Burke

Okay...

Joana Haderer, *Lusa – Agência de Notícias de Portugal*

Thank you, Holy Father. I am going to speak to you in Spanish because it is easier for me. I am going to ask you a question about the case of Portugal, but I think this applies to many of our Western societies. In Portugal, almost all Portuguese identify themselves as Catholic, almost all, almost 90%; but the way the society organizes itself, the decisions we make... are often contrary to the positions of the Church. I am referring to homosexual marriage, to the decriminalization of abortion. Now we are going to begin discussing euthanasia. How do you see this?

Pope Francis

I believe it is a political problem. And also that the Catholic conscience is one that is sometimes not fully obedient to the Church, and does not have a nuanced catechesis, a human catechesis behind it... for the Catechism of the Catholic Church is an example of something serious and nuanced. I believe that this is due to a lack of formation and culture. Because it is curious: in some other regions – I think of Italy, some parts of Latin America – that... They are very Catholic, but they are anticlerical... *mangiapreti* ["priest-eaters"] which... [he laughs]. It is a phenomenon you come across. Sometimes, and...

Joana Haderer

And that worries you?

Pope Francis

Of course it worries me. That's why I say to priests – you will have read this – "Flee from clericalism!" Because clericalism distances you from people. "Flee from clericalism", and let me add: it is a plague in the Church. But here work needs to be done on catechesis too, the formation of conscience, dialogue and human values as well. Thank you.

I thank you all very much for your work and your perceptive questions. Thank you.

Greg Burke

Thank you, Your Holiness.

Pope Francis

And pray for me; don't forget.