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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis in Colombia (6-11 September 2017) – Visit to the Cathedral of Bogotá and Blessing of the faithful at the Cardinal's Palace

Visit to the Cathedral of Bogotá

Blessing of the faithful at the Cardinal's Palace

Visit to the Cathedral of Bogotá

At 10 this morning, the Holy Father transferred by car to the Cathedral of Bogotá.

After a tour of Plaza Bolívar and the granting of the Keys to the City by the Mayor, the Pope entered the Cathedral where he was welcomed by the Cardinal Primate of Colombia, Rubén Salazar Gómez and by the Metropolitan Chapter which presented to him the relics of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

The Holy Father crossed the central nave and reached the altar, where the image of “Nuestra Señora of Chiquinquirá” is located. Around three thousand faithful were present.

After pausing in silent prayer, Pope Francis placed a rosary before the image of the Virgin and, after signing the Book of Honour, transferred on foot to the Cardinal's palace through the “Capilla del Sagrario”, where he greeted the members of the Organising Committee and their families individually.

Blessing of the faithful at the Cardinal's Palace

Following his visit to the Cathedral, the Holy Father blessed the faithful gathered in Plaza Bolívar from the balcony of the Cardinal's Palace, and addressed some words of greeting to them.

Immediately afterwards the two auxiliary bishops and the ten episcopal vicars of Bogotá were introduced to him.

The following is the text of the Pope's signature in the Book of Honour:

Signature in the Book of Honour

“From this Primatial Cathedral, I ask that the Virgin Mary never cease to guide and care for her Colombian children and always to look upon them with merciful eyes”:

The following is the text of Pope Francis' greeting:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I greet you with great joy and I thank you for this warm welcome. “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you” (Lk 10:5-6).

Today I enter this house of Colombia, saying to you: Peace be with you! This was the way of greeting of every Jew, and of Jesus too. I offer this greeting because I wanted to come here as a pilgrim of peace and hope, and I desire to experience these moments of encounter with joy, giving thanks to God for all the good he has done in this nation, in every one of your lives.

And I have also come here to learn; yes, to learn from you, to learn from your faith, your strength in the face of adversity. For you know that the bishop and the priest have to learn from their people, and so I have come to learn, to learn from you; I am a bishop and I have come to learn. You have endured difficult and dark moments, but the Lord is near you, in the heart of every son and daughter of this country. The Lord is not selective, He does not exclude anyone, the Lord embraces all; and all – listen to this – all of us are important and essential to Him. During these days I would like to share with you the most important truth: that God loves us with the love of a Father who encourages us to continue looking for and desiring peace, that peace which is authentic and abiding. God loves us with the love of a Father. Shall we repeat this together? [The phrase is repeated by all]. Thank you!

Well, on my text here are written the words: “I see many young people”, but even if my eyes were blindfolded, I know that this commotion can only be made by young people. You young people, and I want to speak to you, have come from all over the country: from *cachacos*, *costeños*, *paisas*, *vallunos*, *llaneros*, from all sides! For me it is always a pleasure, a joy, to meet young people. Today I say to you: please keep joy alive; it is a sign of a young heart, of a heart that has encountered the Lord. And if you keep alive that joy with Jesus, no one can snatch this away from you (cf. Jn 16:22). But should there be any doubt, let me offer you some advice: Do not let anyone rob you of joy; look after that joy which unites everyone in the knowledge of being loved by the Lord. For, as we said repeated earlier, God loves us... how did it go? [They repeat: “God loves us with the love of a Father”]. God loves us with the heart of a Father”. Let us repeat... [They repeat: “God loves us with the heart of a Father”]. This is the foundation of joy. The flame of Jesus' love makes this joy burst forth, and is sufficient to set the whole world ablaze. How could you not be capable of changing this society and accomplishing all you decide to do! Do not be afraid of the future! Dare to dream big! I want to invite you to that great dream today.

Please do not get into that “chiquitaje” [small-minded talk], don’t aim low, but aim high and dream big.

You, dear young people, have a particular ability of recognizing the suffering of others – it is interesting how you pick up on this immediately – volunteer workers around the world depend on thousands of you who give up your own time, your own comforts and plans, and allow yourselves to be moved by the needs of the most vulnerable, to whom you dedicate yourselves. But this can also emerge in contexts where death, pain and division have impacted you so deeply that they have left you half-dazed, as if numbed by pain. I therefore want to tell you: allow the suffering of your Colombian brothers and sisters to strike you and mobilize you! Help us, your elders, not to grow accustomed to pain and neglect. We need you. Help us in this: to not grow accustomed to pain and neglect.

You, also, young men and women who live in complex environments, with varying realities, and who come from a wide range of family situations, have grown used to seeing that not everything in the world is black and white; you have seen that daily life is in fact made up of a broad scale of grey tones, and that this can expose you to a risk, be careful: the risk of falling into a climate of relativism, thus discarding that potentiality which young people have, of perceiving the pain of those who suffered. You have the capacity not only to judge, to point out mistakes – for you pick up things quickly – but also that other beautiful, constructive ability: that of understanding. An understanding that even behind a wrong – and let us speak clearly, wrong is [always] wrong and cannot be just smoothed over – you are able to see behind it an endless number of causes, of mitigating factors. Colombia needs you so much to put yourselves in the shoes of those who, many generations earlier, could not or did not know how to do so, or did not come up with the right way to reach understanding!

For you, young people, it is so easy to meet one another. It is so easy to meet one another. I ask you: You all met up here, what time did you get here? [They reply] You are brave! You find it easy to meet up. All you need is a gathering such as this, a good coffee, a good drink or any other excuse to meet. And there I go, any excuse to meet up. The young agree on music, on art... Even a final between *Atlético Nacional* and *América de Cali* is an opportunity to get together! For you find it easy to meet together. You teach us, who are older, that the culture of meeting is not in thinking, living or reacting to everyone in the same way. No, it is not that. The culture of encounter, of meeting, is knowing that beyond our differences we are all part of something greater that unites and transcends us; we are part of this wonderful country. Help us to enter, help us who are older, to enter this culture of encounter, of meeting which you put into practice so well.

Your youthfulness also makes you capable of something very difficult in life: forgiving. Forgiving those who have hurt us; it is remarkable to see how you do not get entangled in old stories, how you watch with surprise when we adults repeat events that divide us simply by being tied to resentments. You help us in the desire to leave behind what has hurt us, to look to the future without the burden of hatred; because you make us see the wider world which stands before us, the whole of Colombia that wishes to grow and continue its development; that Colombia which needs all of us, and which we older people owe to you.

And precisely because of this ability to forgive you are facing the enormous challenge of helping us to heal our hearts. Please listen to what I ask of you: help us to heal our hearts. Can we repeat this? [They repeat: “Help us to heal our hearts”]. It is a help I ask of you. To pass on to us the youthful hope that you have, that hope which is always ready to give others a second chance. An atmosphere of anxiety sickens the soul; it sees no way out of problems, and ostracizes those who try; it is an atmosphere that harms the hope every community needs in order to move forwards. May your dreams and plans give fresh life to Colombia, and fill the country with wholesome goals.

Young people, dream, rise up, take risks, look at life with a new smile, go forwards, do not be fearful! Only in this way will people be motivated to discover the country hidden behind the mountains, the one that goes beyond newspaper headlines and which does not seem to be a daily concern since it is so far away. That country which people do not see, that part of the social context which needs us: you young people are able to discover of the depths of Colombia. Young people’s hearts are spurred into action when faced with great challenges: how much natural beauty there is to contemplate, without needing to exploit it! How many young people, like yourselves, need your outstretched hand, need your shoulder so as to discern a better future!

Today I wanted to spend this moment with you; I am certain that you have the potential needed to build, to build the nation we have always dreamed of. Young people are the hope of Colombia and of the Church; in your walking and in your steps we can glimpse the steps of Jesus, the Messenger of Peace, the One who brings us Good News.

I now direct some words to all of you, dear brothers and sisters of this beloved country: children, young people, adults, the elderly, who want to be bearers of hope. Do not let difficulties weigh you down; may violence not break you; may evil not overwhelm you. We believe that Jesus, with His love and mercy that remain forever, has conquered evil, He has conquered sin and death. Jesus has conquered evil, sin and death. Shall we repeat it? [They repeat: "Jesus has conquered evil, sin and death"]. All we need to do is go out to meet him. Go out to meet Jesus. I invite you to be committed, not to be compliant, but committed. What do I invite you to do? [They repeat: "To be committed"]. And what is it you must not do? [They repeat: "Be compliant"]. That's good. Congratulations! Go out with that commitment to renew society, so that it will be just, stable and fruitful. From this place, I encourage you to entrust yourselves to the Lord, Who is the only one who sustains us, the only one Who inspires us to contribute to reconciliation and peace.

I embrace every one of you who are here, the sick, the poorest, the marginalized, those in need, the elderly, those who are housebound... all of you; you are all in my heart. And I ask God to bless you. And, please, I ask you do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

"Hail Mary..."

[The Blessing]
