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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Chile and Peru (15-22 January 2018) – Meeting with the population at the “Institute Jorge Basadre” in Puerto Maldonado

Meeting with the population at the “Institute Jorge Basadre” in Puerto Maldonado

Today, at midday local time (18.00 in Rome), the Holy Father Francis met with the population at the “Institute Jorge Basadre” in Puerto Maldonado.

After greetings from the vicar apostolic, H.E. Msgr. David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea, O.P., and a catechist, the Pope gave his address.

At the end, after the final blessing, the Holy Father transferred by car to the *Hogar El Principito*.

The following is Pope Francis’ address to the population during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I see that you have come not only from the far reaches of the Peruvian Amazon, but also from the Andes and neighbouring countries. What a beautiful image of the Church without borders, where all peoples have a place! How much we need moments like these, to be together and, regardless of our place of origin, to inspire us to build a culture of encounter that renews us in hope.

I thank Bishop David for his words of welcome. I also thank Arturo and Margarita for sharing their experiences with us. They said: “You are visiting a land that is mostly forgotten, wounded and marginalized... but we are not a no man’s land”. Thank you for saying this: we are not a no man’s land. It is something that needs to be emphasized. You are not a no man’s land. This land has names. It has faces. It has you.

This area has a beautiful name: *Madre de Dios*, Mother of God. How can I not speak of Mary, a young woman who lived in a remote, isolated village, also considered by many to be a “no man’s land”. There she received the greatest greeting and invitation imaginable: to be the Mother of God. There are joys that only little ones can hear (cf. *Mt 11:25*).

You have in Mary not only an example to whom you can look, *but also a Mother*. Wherever there is a mother, we don’t have that terrible feeling of belonging to no one, that takes hold when our sense of belonging to a family, to a people, to a land, to our God, begins to fade. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the first thing I would like to say, and I want to say it loud and clear: This is not a land of orphans, but a land that has a Mother! And if it has a mother, it has sons and daughters, a family, a community. Where there is a mother, a family and a community, problems may not disappear, but we certainly find the strength to confront them differently.

It is painful to think that some want to reject this certainty and make *Madre de Dios* a nameless land, without children, a barren land. A place easy to commercialize and exploit. That is why it is good for us to repeat in our homes and communities, and in the depths of each of our hearts: This is not a land of orphans! It has a Mother! This good news has been passed on from generation to generation thanks to the efforts of so many who share this gift of knowing that we are God’s children and who help us to know one another as brothers and sisters.

On a number of occasions, I have spoken of the throwaway culture. A culture that is not satisfied with exclusion, as we have grown accustomed to observe, but advances by silencing, ignoring and throwing out everything that does not serve its interests; as if the alienating consumerism of some is completely unaware of the desperate suffering of others. It is an anonymous culture, without bonds, without faces, a throwaway culture. It is a motherless culture that only wants to consume. The earth is treated in accordance with this logic. Forests, rivers and streams are exploited mercilessly, then left barren and unusable. Persons are also treated in the same way: they are used until someone gets tired of them, then abandoned as “useless”. This is the throwaway culture, it throws away children, it throws away the elderly. As I was being driven around the crowd, there was an elderly lady, 97 years of age. Should we throw away that grandmother? What do you think? No, because she is a grandmother full of the wisdom of her people. Let us applaud the 97-year-old grandmother!

Speaking of these things, allow me to bring up another painful subject. We become accustomed to using the term “human trafficking”. Upon arriving at Puerto Maldonado, at the airport I saw a sign that struck me: “Be on the watch for human trafficking”. This is a sign of growing awareness. But in truth we should speak of slavery: slavery for work, sexual slavery, slavery for profit. It is painful to see how in this land, which is under the protection of the Mother of God, so many women are devalued, denigrated and exposed to endless violence. Violence cannot be seen as “normal”. Violence against women cannot be treated as “normal”, maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. It is not right for us, brothers and sisters, to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon.

Many people have immigrated to Amazonia in search of housing, land and work. They come in search of a better future for themselves and their families. They abandon poor, yet worthy lives. Many of them, in the hope that certain jobs will bring an end to their precarious situations, are drawn by the promising allure of gold mining. But let us not forget that gold can turn into a false god which demands human sacrifices.

False gods, the idols of avarice, money and power, corrupt everything. They corrupt people and institutions, and they ruin the forest. Jesus said that there are demons that require much prayer to expel. This is one of them. I encourage you to continue organizing into movements and communities of every kind in order to help overcome these situations. I likewise encourage you to gather, as people of faith and vibrant ecclesial communities, around the person of Jesus. Through heartfelt prayer and hope-filled encounter with Christ, we will be able to attain the conversion that leads us to true life. Jesus promised us true life, authentic life, eternal life. Not a make-believe life, like the one offered by all those dazzling false promises; they promise life but end up leading us to death.

Brothers and sisters, salvation is not something generic, it is not abstract. Our Father looks at real people, with real faces and concrete histories. Every Christian community must be a reflection of that gaze, that presence

that creates bonds and generates family and community. It is a way of making visible the kingdom of heaven, in communities where everyone feels a part of the whole, where they feel called by name and encouraged to be a builder of life for others.

I have hope in you...moreover, going round I saw many young persons and where there is youth, there we see hope. I have hope in you. Thank you. in the hearts of all those people who seek a blessed life. You have come to seek that life here, amid one of the most exuberant explosions of life on our planet. Love this land, realize that it belongs to you. Breathe it in, listen to it, marvel at it. Fall in love with this land called *Madre de Dios*, commit yourself to it and care for it and defend it. Do not use this land as a mere disposable object, but as a genuine treasure to be enjoyed, cultivated and entrusted to your children.

Let us commend ourselves to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, and place ourselves under her protection. Please, don't forget to pray for me. I now invite you to pray together to the Mother of God.

Hail Mary...

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