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Apostolic Trip of His Holiness Francis in Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius (4 to 10 September 2019) – Welcome Ceremony in Port Louis, Holy Mass at the Monument of Mary Queen of Peace and Lunch with the Bishops of the CEDOI at the Episcopal Residence of Port Louis

Welcome Ceremony at Port Louis Airport

Holy Mass at the Monument of Mary Queen of Peace

The Holy Father's words of thanks at the end of the Holy Mass

Lunch with the Bishops of the CEDOI at the Episcopal Residence of Port Louis

Welcome Ceremony at Port Louis Airport

On arrival at Port Louis International Airport, at 10.25 (8.25 in Rome) the Holy Father Francis was welcomed by the prime minister, Mr. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and his wife, and by His Eminence Cardinal Maurice Piat, C.S.Sp., bishop of Port Louis. Two children in traditional dress offered him a floral tribute.

After the presentation of the respective delegations, the Pope greeted three bishops of the CEDOI (Indian Ocean Episcopal Conference). Then, after the performance of the hymns and the military honours, the Holy Father passed through the Guard of Honour. The prime minister and his wife then accompanied the Pope to the car in which he transferred to the Monument of Mary Queen of Peace for the celebration of Holy Mass. Before arriving at the Monument, Pope Francis changed cars in front of the Cathedral, where he was welcomed by a family.

Holy Mass at the Monument of Mary Queen of Peace

At midday local time (10.00 in Rome) the Holy Father Francis arrived at the Monument of Mary Queen of Peace in Port Louis.

After touring among the faithful by popemobile, upon arrival in the sacristy he was received by the parish priest of the Shrine and by the mayor of Port Louis. Then, at 12.15 (10.15 in Rome), the Pope presided at the Eucharistic Celebration in the solemnity of Blessed Jacques-Désiré Laval, whose relics were displayed on the altar. After the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father pronounced his homily. Around 100,000 faithful were present at the celebration.

At the end of the Holy Mass, the bishop of Port Louis, His Eminence Cardinal Maurice Piat, C.S.Sp., addressed his greeting to Pope Francis. Before the final blessing, the Holy Father pronounced some words of thanksgiving. Then, after taking leave of those present, he transferred by car to the Episcopal Residence.

The following is the homily pronounced by Pope Francis during the Holy Mass, and the words of thanksgiving at the end of the Celebration:

Homily of the Holy Father

Here, before this altar dedicated to Mary Queen of Peace, on this mountain from which we can see the city and the sea beyond, we are part of a great multitude, a sea of faces come from Mauritius and other islands of this Indian Ocean region to hear Jesus preach the Beatitudes. We have come to hear that same word of life that today, as two thousand years ago, has the power and the fire able to warm the coldest of hearts. Together we can say to the Lord: We believe in you, and with the light of faith and every beat of our hearts, we know the truth of the words of the prophet Isaiah: Proclaim peace and salvation, bring the good news… that our God already reigns.

The Beatitudes “are like a Christian’s identity card. So if anyone asks: ‘What must one do to be a good Christian?’, the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 63). So it was with the “apostle of Mauritian unity”, Blessed Jacques-Désiré Laval, so greatly venerated in these lands. Love for Christ and for the poor so marked his life that he could not conceive of an “aloof and sanitized” preaching of the Gospel. He knew that evangelization entails becoming all things to all people (cf. *1 Cor* 9:19-22), and so he learned the language of the recently freed slaves and taught them the Good News of salvation in simple language. He was able to gather the faithful, to train them for mission and to establish small Christian communities in the neighbourhoods, towns and nearby villages: small communities, many of which gave rise to present-day parishes. His pastoral solicitude earned the trust of the poor and outcast, and made them the first to come together and find responses to their sufferings.

Through his missionary outreach and his love, Father Laval gave to the Mauritian Church a new youth, a new life, that today we are asked to carry forward.

We need to foster this missionary momentum, because it can happen that, as the Church of Christ, we can yield to the temptation to lose our enthusiasm for evangelization by taking refuge in worldly securities that slowly but surely not only affect the mission but actually hamper it and prevent it from drawing people together (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 26). Missionary momentum always has a young and invigorating face. For it is the young who, by their vitality and generosity, can give it the beauty and freshness of youth, when they challenge the Christian community to renewal and urge us to strike out in new directions (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 37).

This is not always easy. It means learning to acknowledge the presence of the young and to make room for them in our communities and in our society.

It is a hard thing to say, but, despite the economic growth your country has known in recent decades, it is the young who are suffering the most. They suffer from unemployment, which not only creates uncertainty about the future, but also prevents them from believing that they play a significant part in your shared history. Uncertainty about the future often forces them to feel that they have live their life on the fringes of society; it leaves them vulnerable and helpless before new forms of slavery in this twenty-first century. Our young people are the primoary mission! We must invite them to find their happiness in Jesus; not by speaking to them in an aloof or distant way, but by learning how to make room for them, "learning their language", listening to their stories, spending time with them and making them feel that they too are blessed by God. Let us not deprive ourselves of the young face of the Church and of society. Let us not allow those who deal in death to rob the first fruits of this land!

Father Laval tells our young people, and all those who, like them, feel voiceless, simply living from day to day, to take up Isaiah's proclamation: "Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem!" (*Is* 52:9). Even though we may feel overwhelmed and trapped, our hope in Jesus invites us to a renewed certainty in God's victory, not only beyond history but also within the hidden thread of all those little "histories" that intertwine and convince us of the victory of the One who has given us the kingdom.

Living the Gospel message means that we cannot keep hoping that everything around us will be perfect, for all too often the thirst for power and worldly interests work against us. Saint John Paul II noted that: "a society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer [the] gift of self and to establish solidarity between people" (*Centesimus Annus*, 41c). In such a society, it becomes difficult to live the Beatitudes: any attempt to do so will be viewed negatively, regarded with suspicion, and met with ridicule (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 91). This is true, yet we must not let ourselves yield to discouragement.

At the foot of this mountain, which today I would like to be the Mount of the Beatitudes, we must also discover anew Christ's call to be "blessed". Only joyful Christians awaken in others the desire to follow this path. The word "blessed" means "happy". It becomes a synonym for "holy", for it expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness (cf. ibid., 64).

When we hear the threatening prognosis that "our numbers are decreasing", we should be concerned not so much with the decline of this or that mode of consecration in the Church, but with the lack of men and women who wish to experience happiness on the paths of holiness. We should be concerned with the lack of men and women who let their hearts burn with the most beautiful and liberating of all messages. Indeed, "if anything should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49).

When young people see the project of a Christian life being carried out with joy, this excites and encourages them. They too feel a desire to say, in so many words: "I too want to climb this Mount of the Beatitudes; I too want to meet the gaze of Jesus and to learn from him the path to true joy".

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray for our communities, that they may testify to the joy of Christian life and see a flowering of the call to holiness in the many and varied forms of life that the Spirit proposes to us. Let us pray to him for this diocese and for all those who have made the effort to come here today. Blessed Father Laval, whose relics we venerate, also experienced moments of disappointment and difficulty with the Christian community, but in the end, the Lord triumphed in his heart. For he had put his trust in the Lord's power. Let us pray that that same power may touch the hearts of many men and women of this land, and our hearts as well, so that its newness may always be capable of renewing our lives and our communities (cf. ibid., 11). Let us not forget that the one who summons with power, who builds up the Church, is the Holy Spirit, with his power. He is the protagonist of evangelization. He is the protagonist of the Church.

The statue of Mary, the Mother who protects and accompanies us, reminds us that she herself was called "blessed". Let us ask her for the gift of openness to the Holy Spirit. Our Lady experienced a sorrow that pierced

her heart like a sword, and crossed the most painful threshold of grief as she beheld the death of her Son. May she obtain for us that persevering joy that never falters or fades. The joy that constantly leads us to experience and proclaim: “The Most High has done great things, and holy is his name”.

The Holy Father’s words of thanks at the end of the Holy Mass

Before concluding this celebration, I would like to offer all of you my cordial greeting and heartfelt thanks. I especially thank Cardinal Piat for his kind words and for all the work that went into preparing this visit. I also thank Bishop Aubry, the coordinator, the translator and all those who assisted in any way, and the entire people of God of this Church.

To the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the other authorities of the country, whom I will meet this afternoon, I express my deep appreciation for their warm welcome and for their prompt and generous assistance.

My affectionate thanks also go to the priests, the deacons, the consecrated men and women, and the many volunteers. My thoughts go also to those in prison who have followed the “Alpha” programme in prison, and wrote letters to me; I send them my warm greetings and my blessing.

Finally, I greet with deep gratitude all the People of God here present, and particularly the faithful from Seychelles, Réunion, the Comoros, Chagos, Agaléga, Rodrigues and Mauritius. I assure all of you of my prayers and my closeness. May the Lord continue to grant to all the wisdom and strength needed to attain their legitimate aspirations. And I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me. Thank you, all of you!

Lunch with the Bishops of the CEDOI at the Episcopal Residence of Port Louis

At 14.15 (12.15 in Rome) the Holy Father Francis arrived in the Episcopal Residence of Port Louis where, in the refectory, he lunched with the five bishops of the CEDOI (Episcopal Conference of the Indian Ocean), which unites the prelates of the diocese of Port Louis and of the Apostolic Vicariate of Rodrigues, Mauritius, the diocese of Saint-Denis-de-La-Réunion, the diocese of Port-Victoria, Seychelles, and the apostolic vicariate of the Comoros.

Before leaving the Episcopal Residence, the Pope greeted the Anglican bishop and then, in the courtyard of the building, around thirty people working at the residence. He then transferred by car to Père Laval’s Shrine for the private visit.