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Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father Francis in Mongolia (31 August to 4 September 2023) – Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Missionaries, Consecrated Men and Women, and Pastoral Workers at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul

Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Missionaries, Consecrated Men and Women, and Pastoral Workers at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul

In the afternoon, the Holy Father Francis left the Apostolic Prefecture and transferred by car to the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul for the meeting with bishops, priests, missionaries, consecrated men and women, and pastoral workers.

Upon arrival at the internal entrance of the Cathedral, before getting into the golf car to tour several times among the faithful, the Pope was received by a Mongolian woman who, at the entrance of a *ger*, offered him a cup of milk wrapped in a blue scarf. Then, accompanied by the prefect apostolic of Ulaanbaatar, His Eminence Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, I.M.C., he entered the *ger*, where he had a brief meeting with Ms. Tsetsege, the woman who, around a decade ago, had found a wooden statuette of Our Lady among the refuse, which was then enthroned in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, and is now known as the “Mother of Heaven”.

At 16.25 (10.25 in Rome), Pope Francis met with bishops, priests, missionaries, consecrated men and women, and pastoral workers.

After being greeted at the entrance of the Cathedral by the parish priest and deputy parish priest, who brought him the cross and holy water for aspersion, the Pope proceeded along the central nave up to the altar. Then, after the singing of a hymn and the welcome greeting from the President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Central Asia, Bishop José Luis Mumbiela Sierra of the Holy Trinity in Almaty, followed by testimonies from a missionary sister and a Mongolian priest, an artistic performance, and the testimony of a pastoral worker. The Pope then delivered his address.

At the end, after the recitation of the Hail Mary, the blessing and the final chant, the Holy Father blessed the statue of Our Lady, “Mother of Heaven”. He then greeted the bishops and missionaries present and, before entering the car, paused briefly in a hall in the Cathedral to greet a group of the faithful. After the group photo, he

left the Cathedral and returned by car to the Apostolic Prefecture, where he dined in private.

According to the authorities, around 2000 people were present in the Cathedral grounds.

The following is the address delivered by Pope Francis during the meeting with bishops, priests, missionaries, consecrated men and women, and pastoral workers:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good afternoon!

Thank you, Your Excellency, for your kind words. Thank you Sister Salvia, Father Peter Sanjaajav and Rufina for your testimonies. Thank you, all of you, for your presence and your faith! I am happy to be with you all. The joy of the Gospel is what has motivated you, consecrated men and women in religious life and in ordained ministry, to be here and to dedicate yourselves, together with your lay sisters and brothers, to the service of the Lord and of others. I thank God for this, using the words of a beautiful prayer of praise, Psalm 34, which I will draw upon in order to share some thoughts with you. The Psalm invites us to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (v. 9).

“Taste and see”, because the joy and goodness of the Lord are not fleeting; they remain within us, giving flavour to our lives and making us see things in a new way, just as you said, Rufina, in your beautiful testimony. I would like, then, to “taste” the flavor of the faith in this land by calling to mind above all faces, stories and lives spent for the Gospel. *To spend one’s life for the Gospel*. That is a beautiful way to define the missionary vocation of Christians, and in particular, how that vocation is being lived by Christians here. To spend one’s life for the Gospel!

I would start by remembering Bishop Wenceslao Selga Padilla, the first Apostolic Prefect, a pioneer in the contemporary history of the Church in Mongolia, who built this Cathedral. Here, however, the faith does not date back simply to the nineties of the last century; it has ancient roots. The events of the first millennium and the work of evangelization carried out by missionaries of Syriac tradition along the Silk Road were followed by a remarkable missionary outreach. How can we fail to mention the diplomatic missions of the thirteenth century, and the apostolic care manifested by the appointment, around the year 1310, of John of Montecorvino as the first Bishop of Khanbalik, with responsibility for this entire vast region of the world under the Mongolian Yuan dynasty? He provided the first translation of the Psalms and the New Testament into Mongolian. This great history of passion for the Gospel was taken up anew, in an extraordinary way, with the arrival in 1992 of the first missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who were joined by members of other Institutes, diocesan priests and lay missionaries. Among all of them, I would like to single out the energy and zeal of Father Stephen Kim Seong-hyeon. Let us acknowledge too, all those many faithful servants of the Gospel in Mongolia who are here with us now and who, having spent their lives for Christ, can “see” and “taste” the marvels that his goodness continues to accomplish in you and through you. Thank you.

Why should anyone spend his or her life for the Gospel? That is a question I would ask you. As Rufina said, the Christian life moves forward by asking questions, like children who are always asking new things, because at their age they do not understand everything. The Christian life draws us close to the Lord and always asks questions, in order that we will better understand the Lord, better understand his teaching. Spend your life for the Gospel because you have “tasted” the God who made himself visible, able to be touched and encountered in Jesus. Yes, Jesus is the good news, meant for all peoples, the message that the Church must constantly proclaim, embody in her life and “whisper” to the heart of every individual and all cultures. God’s language is very often a slow whisper, that takes its time; God speaks in that way. The experience of God’s love in Christ is pure light that brightens and transforms our countenance. Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is born of contemplating the Lord’s face; it is about love, daily encounter with the Lord in his word and in the Bread of Life, and in the faces of others, the needy and the poor in whom Jesus is present. You reminded of this, Sister Salvia, in your testimony. Thank you! You have been here for more than twenty years and have learnt to how to talk to

this people; thank you.

In these thirty-one years of presence in Mongolia, you, dear priests, consecrated persons and pastoral workers, have embarked upon a wide variety of charitable initiatives, which absorb much of your energy and reflect the merciful face of Christ the Good Samaritan. This is, in a sense, your calling card, and it has made you respected and esteemed for the numerous benefits provided to many people in various fields: from social assistance and education, to health care and the promotion of culture. I encourage you to continue along this path, which has proved so fruitful and beneficial for the beloved Mongolian people, with gestures of love and acts of charity.

At the same time, I urge you to *taste and see the Lord*, to keep returning to that original “gaze” from which everything began. Otherwise, our strength will fail and our pastoral work will risk becoming an empty delivery of services, a roster of duties that end up inducing only weariness and frustration. Yet when we remain in contact with the face of Christ, seeking him in the Scriptures and contemplating him in *silent adoration* before the tabernacle, we come to see him in the faces of those we serve and experience an interior joy that, even amid hardship, brings peace to our hearts. This is what we need, today and always: not people who run around, busy and distracted, carrying out projects but also at times appearing resentful about a life that is surely not easy. Instead, a Christian is one who is capable of adoration, worshiping in silence. And then, out of this adoration springs activity. Yet, do not forget adoration. We have somewhat lost the meaning of adoration in this pragmatic century: do not forget to *adore* and, from adoration, to *act*. We need to return to the source, to the face of Jesus and to “taste” his presence, for he is our treasure (cf. *Mt 13:44*), the pearl of great price for which it is worth spending everything (cf. *Mt 13:45-46*). Our Mongolian brothers and sisters, who have a keen sense of the sacred and – as is typical here in Asia – an ancient and complex religious history, look for your witness and can recognize if it is genuine. This is a testimony that you must give, because the Gospel does not grow through proselytizing, the Gospel grows through bearing witness.

The Lord Jesus, in sending his disciples into the world, did not send them to spread political theories, but to bear witness by their lives to the newness of his relationship with his Father, now “our Father” (cf. *Jn 20:17*), which is the source of concrete fraternity with every individual and people. The Church born of that mandate is a poor Church, sustained only by genuine faith and by the unarmed and disarming power of the Risen Lord, and capable of alleviating the sufferings of wounded humanity. For this reason, governments and secular institutions have nothing to fear from the Church’s work of evangelization, for she has no political agenda to advance, but is sustained by the quiet power of God’s grace and a message of mercy and truth, which is meant to promote the good of all.

To carry out this mission, Christ structured his Church in a way that reminds us of the harmony existing among the various members of the human body. He is the head, the one who constantly guides us, pouring forth into his body – into us – his Spirit, at work above all in those signs of new life that are the sacraments. To ensure the authenticity and efficacy of the latter, he instituted the order of priests, marked by an intimate association with him, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the flock. You, Father Peter, were called to this mission, and I thank you for sharing your experience with us. So too, the holy People of God in Mongolia have the fullness of spiritual gifts. From this perspective, I urge you to see in your bishop, not a manager but the living icon of Christ the Good Shepherd, who gathers and guides his people; a disciple filled with the apostolic charism of building up your fraternity in Christ and rooting it ever more deeply in this nation and its noble cultural heritage. The fact, then, that your Bishop is a Cardinal is an even greater sign of closeness: all of you though physically distant, are very close to the heart of Peter. And in turn, the entire Church is close to you and to your community, which is truly Catholic, universal, and directs the love of all our brothers and sisters throughout the world to Mongolia, in a great outpouring of ecclesial communion.

Let me stress that word: *communion*. The Church cannot be understood in merely functional terms. No, the Church is not a business, she does not grow through proselytism, as I mentioned. The Church is something else. The word “communion” explains well what the Church is. In this body of the Church, the bishop is not a manager of its diverse elements, even perhaps based on the principle of majority, but leads on the basis of a spiritual principle, whereby Jesus himself becomes present in the person of the bishop in order to ensure communion in his mystical Body. In other words, unity in the Church is not about order and respect, nor is it simply a good strategy for “teamwork”; it is about faith and love for the Lord, about fidelity to him. Consequently,

it is important for all ecclesial elements to remain firmly united around the bishop, who represents Christ alive in the midst of his People, and to build up the synodal fellowship that we preach and that greatly assists the inculturation of the faith.

Dearest missionaries, “taste and see” the gift that you are, taste and see the beauty of giving yourselves entirely to Christ who called you to be witnesses of his love here in Mongolia. Continue to do this by cultivating communion. Do it through the simplicity of a frugal life, in imitation of the Lord, who entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey and who, on the cross, was stripped even of his robe. May you always be close to the people, with that closeness that is God’s way. God is close, compassionate and tender. Closeness, compassion and tenderness: treat people like that, personally caring for them, learning their language, respecting and loving their culture, not allowing yourselves to be tempted by worldly forms of security, but remaining steadfast in the Gospel through exemplary moral and spiritual lives. Simplicity and closeness! Never tire of bringing to Jesus the faces and the situations you encounter, the problems and concerns. Devote time to daily prayer, which will enable you to persevere in the work of service and to draw consolation from the “God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3), and thus bring hope to the hearts of all those who suffer.

Brothers and sisters, closeness to the Lord reassures us that, as Psalm 34 tells us, “those who fear him have no want...; those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (vv. 9-10). Certainly, the faults and problems of life also affect believers, and evangelizers are not exempt from the burden of worry that is part of our human condition. The Psalmist does not hesitate to speak of evil and evildoers, but he reminds us that the Lord hears the cry of the humble and “delivers them out of all their troubles”, for he “is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit” (vv. 18-19). For this reason, the Church presents herself before the world as a voice of solidarity with all who are poor and needy; she refuses to remain silent in the face of injustice and works quietly to promote the dignity of every human being.

Beloved brothers and sisters, in your journey as missionary disciples, you have a sure support: our heavenly Mother, who – and I was so pleased to discover this! – wished to give you a tangible sign of her gentle and caring presence by allowing a likeness of herself to be found in a landfill. In a place for refuse, this beautiful statue of the Immaculate Mother appeared. Herself free and undefiled by sin, she wanted to draw so close to us as to descend to the dregs of society, so that from the filth of a rubbish heap the purity of the holy Mother of God, our heavenly Mother, could shine forth. I also learned about the lovely Mongolian tradition of the *suun dalai jiji*, the mother with the heart as big as an ocean of milk. According to the *Secret History of the Mongols*, a light from the upper opening of a ger impregnated the mythic queen Alungoo; you, however, can contemplate in the motherhood of the Virgin Mary the working of the divine light that, from on high, daily accompanies the steps of your Church.

As you lift your eyes to Mary, then, may you find refreshment, knowing that being little is not a problem, but a resource. God loves littleness, and through it he loves to accomplish great things, as Mary herself bears witness (cf. Lk 1:48-49). Brothers and sisters, do not be concerned about small numbers, limited success, or apparent irrelevance. That is not how God works. Let us keep our gaze fixed on Mary, who in her littleness is greater than the heavens, for within her she bore the One whom the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain (cf. 1 Kings 8:27). Brothers and sisters, let us entrust ourselves to her, asking for a renewed zeal and an ardent love that tirelessly and joyfully bears witness to the Gospel. Onwards! Be courageous, do not tire of moving forward. Thank you for your witness! The Lord himself has chosen you and believes in you; I am with you and with all my heart I say to you: thank you; thank you for your witness, thank you for your lives poured out for the Gospel! Persevere, constant in prayer and creative in charity, steadfast in communion, joyful and meek in everything and with everyone. I bless you from my heart, and I will keep you in my prayers. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me. Thank you.
