



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO LESVOS (GREECE) IN-FLIGHT PRESS

CONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

FROM LESVOS TO ROME *Papal Flight*

Saturday, 16 April 2016 **[Multimedia]**

During the return flight after the visit to the island of Lesbos, early Saturday afternoon, 16 April, the Pope's traditional press conference was introduced by Fr Federico Lombardi, Director of the Holy See Press Office. Fr Lombardi first read a statement regarding the Pontiff's gesture of welcoming three families of Syrian refugees, all of whom are Muslim, and then the conversation between Pope Francis and the journalists began. The following is a translation of the questions and the transcript of the responses given by the Pope, who opened the dialogue with the following words:

First of all, I would like to thank you for this day of work, which was very intense for me, all too intense... and for you too, certainly. Please, Ms....

Inés San Martín, of the 'Cruz' Catholic information website, asked in Spanish whether the agreement between the European Union and Turkey on the question of refugees in Greece was merely a political gesture. She then requested a comment on the morning's brief encounter at Santa Marta with U.S. presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.

No, first there is no political speculation because I was not very familiar with these agreements between Turkey and Greece. I saw in the newspapers..., but this is something simply humane [referring to the initiative of welcoming the three refugee families]. It is a humanitarian matter. It was an inspiration that actually came to one of my collaborators a week ago, and I immediately accepted because I saw that the Spirit was speaking. Everything was done properly: they are coming with documents; the three governments — Vatican City State, the Italian government and the Greek government — have investigated everything, they looked at everything and they granted the visas. They are being accepted by the Vatican: the Vatican, with the cooperation of the Sant'Egidio Community, will find them jobs, if there are any, or support them.... They are guests of the Vatican, and they are joining two Syrian families who have already been welcomed in the two Vatican parishes.

Second, this morning, when I was leaving, Senator Sanders, who had come to the conference of

the *Centesimus Annus* Foundation, was there. He knew that I was going out at that time and he was kind enough to greet me. I greeted him and I shook hands with him, his wife, and another couple with him who were staying at Santa Marta, because all the members were staying at Santa Marta, except for the two president participants who, I believe, stayed at their embassies. When I went down, he introduced himself and greeted me, a handshake and nothing more. This is good manners; it is good manners and not getting involved in politics. If anyone thinks that saying hello to someone is getting involved in politics. I would suggest they find a psychiatrist! (with a laugh)

Fr Lombardi then gave the floor to Franca Giansoldati of 'Il Messaggero'.

The Pope quipped:

But first she must prepare for Armenia....

The Vatican correspondent for the Roman daily newspaper pointed out that the Pope often speaks of “welcoming” and less of “integration”. She then referred to the ghetto neighbourhoods of European cities, where Muslim immigrants most struggle to integrate. She asked why Francis gave preference to three entirely Muslim families.

I did not choose between Christians and Muslims. These three families had their papers in order, the necessary documents, and so it was possible. There were, for example, two Christian families on the first list who did not have their papers in order. It is not a privilege. All twelve of them are children of God. The “privilege” is being children of God: this is true. Regarding integration: what you are saying is very intelligent. Thank you for saying it. You said a word that in our current culture seems to be forgotten, after the war.... Today there are ghettos. Some of the terrorists who have committed acts of terrorism — some — are children and grandchildren of people born in these countries, in Europe. What happened? There was no policy of integration and to me this is fundamental; indeed so much that you see that in the Post-Synodal Exhortation on the Family — this is another issue — one of the three pastoral dimensions for families experiencing difficulties is integration in the life of the Church. Today, Europe must resume this capacity that it has always had, of integrating. Because the nomads, the Normans and many peoples came to Europe and Europe has integrated them and enriched its culture. I think that we need to learn about, and to educate in, integration. Thank you.

Elena Pinardi, of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), asked whether with the reinforcements at the borders of European countries, the checks and the actual deployment of troops could mean the end of the Schengen Agreement and of the European dream.

I don't know. I understand the governments, and the peoples, who have a certain fear. I understand this and we must be very responsible in our welcome. One aspect of that responsibility is this: how we can integrate these people and ourselves. I have always said that building walls is

not a solution. We saw one fall in the last century. It resolves nothing. We must build bridges. But bridges are built intelligently, with dialogue, with integration. That is why I can understand a certain apprehension. But for a country to close its borders resolves nothing, because in the long run it harms its own people. Europe urgently needs to create policies of welcoming and integration, of growth, of employment, of economic reform.... All these things are bridges that will lead us not to build walls. I completely understand this fear; but after what I have seen — I am changing the subject, but I want to say it today — and what you too have seen, in that refugee camp.... brought tears to our eyes! The children... I brought with me to show you: the children gave me many drawings. Here is one. What do the children want? Peace, because they are suffering. There are educational courses there, in the camp.... What those children have seen! Look at this other one: They also saw a little boy drown. The children have this in their heart! Truly, today it made us weep. This boy from Afghanistan drew the same thing: here the boat that came from Afghanistan is returning to Greece. These children have this in their memory! It will take time to process this. Look at this one: the sun is watching and weeping. But if the sun is able to weep, so can we: a tear would do us good.

Fanny Carrier, of the 'France Presse' agency, asked why the Pope does not differentiate between migrants fleeing from war and those fleeing from hunger, and whether Europe can accept all of the poverty of the world.

It's true. I said today in my speech: "some flee from war, others flee from hunger". Both of these are the effects of exploitation, also of the earth itself.... A government leader from Africa told me, a month ago, more or less, that the first decision of his government was to reforest, because the land had become barren after the exploitation of deforestation. Good things need to be done on both fronts. But some people flee hunger and others war. I would invite arms traffickers — because weapons are being produced, up to a certain point there are agreements... but the dealers, those who traffic in order to carry on wars in various places, for example in Syria: those who give weapons to the various groups — I would invite these traffickers to spend a day in that camp. I think this would be healthy for them!

Néstor Pongutá, of 'W Radio Colombia', asked whether the Pope's feelings had changed between the time of his departure for Lesbos, when he had spoken of the sad journey, and the time of his return, marked by the reception of 12 refugees.

I am going to plagiarize! I'll answer with a phrase that is not mine. The same question was asked of Mother Teresa: "All this effort, all this work, only to help people to die.... What you are doing is useless! The sea is so great!". Mother Teresa answered: "It is a drop of water in the sea! But after this drop of water the sea will not be the same!". That is how I would respond. It is a small gesture. But one of those small gestures that we must make, everyone, men and women, to reach out to those in need.

Joshua McElwee, of the weekly National Catholic Reporter, questioned the Pope on the economic policy of austerity.

The word austerity has a different meaning depending on which point of view you take: in economic terms it means a component of a plan; in political terms it means something else; in spiritual and Christian terms yet another. When I speak of austerity, I am speaking of austerity in comparison with waste. I heard it said at the FAO — I think it was in a meeting of the FAO — that with what we throw away from our tables all the hunger in the world could be sated. And we, in our homes, how much we waste, how much we waste without wanting to! This is the throw-away culture, the culture of waste. I speak of austerity in that sense, in the Christian sense. Let us stop for a moment and live a little more austere.

Francisco Romero, of the television agency, Rome Reports, shifted focus to the crisis of immigrants arriving in the United States, from Mexico and throughout Latin America.

It's the same thing. It is the same, because they arrive there fleeing from hunger instead. It is the same problem. In Ciudad Juárez I celebrated Mass a hundred metres, perhaps less, from the fence. On the other side there were about fifty bishops from the United States and a stadium with fifty thousand people following the Mass on the jumbo screen; on our side, in Mexico, there was a camp full of people.... It is the same. They come to Mexico from Central America. You remember that two months ago, there was a conflict with Nicaragua because Nicaragua did not want refugees to pass through: it was resolved. They took them by airplane to the other country without passing through Nicaragua. It is a worldwide problem. I spoke about it there, to Mexican Bishops; I asked them to take care of the refugees.

Francis Rocca of The Wall Street Journal mentioned the recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation and asked whether or not has been any change in the discipline concerning reception of the sacraments by the divorced and remarried.

I could say “yes” and leave it at that. But that would be too brief a response. I recommend that all of you read the presentation made by Cardinal Schönborn, a great theologian. He is a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and he knows the Church's teaching very well. Your question will find its answer in that presentation. Thank you.

Jean-Marie Guénois, of the French daily 'Le Figaro', continued on the same subject, noting that it was addressed only in one footnote, n. 351, of 'Amoris Laetitia'.

Look, one of the recent Popes, speaking about the Council, said that there were two Councils: Vatican II, which took place in Saint Peter's Basilica, and another Council which took place in the media. When I called the first Synod, the most of the media were concerned with one question: Will the divorced and remarried be able to receive communion? Since I am not a saint, this was

somewhat annoying to me, and even made me a bit sad. Because I think: those media that say all these things, don't they realize that that is not the important issue? Don't they realize that the family, all over the world, is in crisis? And the family is the basis of society! Don't they realize that young people don't want to get married? Don't they realize that the declining birth rate in Europe is enough to make us weep? Don't they realize that the shortage of jobs and employment opportunities is forcing fathers and mothers to take two jobs and children to grow up by themselves and not learn how to talk with their mothers and fathers? These are the big issues! I do not remember that footnote, but surely if something of that sort is in a footnote it is because it was said in the *Evangelii Gaudium*. I don't recall the number, but surely that is the case.

At the end the Director of the Holy See Press Office thanked the Pope, who then concluded:

Thank you for being with me. Truly I feel at ease with you. Thank you very much. Thank you for your company.