

POPE FRANCIS



PĀVESTS FRANCISKS
LATVIJA 2018

Monsira te esse Matrem!
Rīdī ka esi Māte!



APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE BALTIC COUNTRIES: LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA

22-25 September 2018

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TO THE BALTIC COUNTRIES:
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22-25 SEPTEMBER 2018

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MEETING WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Square in front of the Presidential Palace (Vilnius)
Saturday, 22 September 2018

Madam President, Members of Government and of the Diplomatic Corps, Representatives of Civil Society, Distinguished Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen,,

It is a source of joy and hope to begin this pilgrimage to the Baltic countries in Lithuania, which is, in the words of Saint John Paul II, “a silent witness of a passionate love for religious freedom” (*Welcome Ceremony, Vilnius, 4 September 1993*).

I thank you, Madam President, for your cordial words of welcome in your own name and that of your people. In addressing you, I wish to greet in the first place the entire Lithuanian people, who today open to me the doors of their homes and of their homeland. To all of you I express my affection and sincere gratitude.

This visit takes place at a particularly important moment in your life as a nation, for you celebrate this year the centenary of your declaration of independence.

It has been a century marked by your bearing numerous trials and sufferings: detentions, deportations, even martyrdom. Celebrating the hundredth anniversary of independence means taking time to stop and revive the memory of all those experiences. In this way, you will be in touch with everything that forged you as a nation, and thus find the key to assessing present challenges and looking to the future in a spirit of dialogue and unity with all those who dwell here, careful to ensure that no one remains excluded. Each generation is challenged to make its own the struggles and achievements of the past, and to honour in the present the memory of all those who have gone before. We do not know what tomorrow bring, yet we do know that each age has the duty to

cherish the “soul” that created it and helped it to turn every situation of sorrow and injustice into opportunity, preserving alive and healthy the roots that nurtured the fruits we enjoy today. Truly, this people has a strong “soul” that enables it to hold fast and to keep building! This is the prayer voiced in your national hymn: “May your sons draw strength and vigour from your past experience”, so as to face the present with courage.

“May your sons draw strength and vigour from your past experience”

Throughout its history, Lithuania was able to shelter, receive and accept peoples of various ethnic groups and religions. All found a place to live in this land – Lithuanians, Tartars, Poles, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Germans ... Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Old Catholics, Muslims, Jews – lived together in peace until the arrival of totalitarian ideologies that, by sowing violence and lack of trust, undermined its ability to accept and harmonize differences. To draw strength from the past is to recover those roots and keep alive all that continues to be most authentic and distinctive about you, everything that enabled you to grow and not succumb as a nation: tolerance, hospitality, respect and solidarity.

If we look at the world scene in our time, more and more voices are sowing division and confrontation – often by exploiting insecurity or situations of conflict – and proclaiming that the only way possible to guarantee security and the continued existence of a culture is to try to eliminate, cancel or expel others. Here you Lithuanians have a word of your own to contribute: “welcoming differences”. Through dialogue, openness and understanding, you can become a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe. This is the fruit of a mature history, which you as a people can offer to the international community and to the European Community in particular. You have suffered “in the flesh” those efforts to impose a single model that would annul differences under the pretence of believing that the privileges of a few are more important than the dignity of others or the common good. As Benedict XVI rightly pointed out: “to desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity ... The more we strive to secure a

common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 7). All conflicts presently emerging will find lasting solutions only if those solutions are grounded in the concrete recognition of [the dignity of] persons, especially the most vulnerable, and in the realization that all of us are challenged “to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 235).

In this sense, to draw strength from the past is to pay attention to the young, who are not only the future but also the present of this nation, if they can remain attached to the roots of the people. A people in which young persons can find room for growth and for employment, will help them feel that they have a leading role to play in building up the social and communitarian fabric. This will make it possible for all to lift their gaze with hope to the future. The Lithuania of which they dream will depend on tireless efforts to promote policies that encourage the active participation of young people in society. Doubtless, this will prove a seed of hope, for it will lead to a dynamic process in which the “soul” of this people will continue to generate hospitality: hospitality towards the stranger, hospitality towards the young, towards the elderly, who are the living memory, towards the poor, and, ultimately, hospitality towards the future.

I assure you, Madam President, that you can continue to count on the efforts and the cooperation of the Catholic Church, so that this land can fulfil its vocation as land that serves as bridge of communion and hope.

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VISIT TO THE MATER MISERICORDIAE SHRINE

Saturday, 22 September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are standing before the Gate of Dawn, the only remnant of the defensive walls of this city, which served to defend it from all danger and threat. In 1799, the invading forces razed that wall, leaving only this gate. Even then, it sheltered the image of the Virgin Mary “Mother of Mercy”, the holy Mother of God who is always ready to help us, to come to our aid.

From that time forward, Mary has sought to teach us that we can defend without attacking, that we can keep safe without the unhealthy need to distrust others. This Mother without Child, radiant with gold, is the Mother of everyone. She sees in every person who comes here what we ourselves fail so often to see: the face of her Son Jesus impressed on our heart.

Because the image of Jesus is impressed on every human heart, every man and every woman make it possible for us to encounter God. When we close our hearts for fear of others, when we build walls and barricades, we end up depriving ourselves of the Good News of Jesus, who shares in the history and the lives of others. In the past, we built all too many fortresses, but today we feel the need to look one another in the face and acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters, to walk side by side, and to discover and experience with joy and peace the value of fraternity (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87).

Here each day crowds of people from numerous countries come to visit the Mother of Mercy: Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians and Russians; Catholics and Orthodox. Today this is possible, thanks to ready communications and the freedom of circulation between our countries. How good it would be if this ease in moving from one place to another could be accompanied by ease in establishing points of

encounter and solidarity, so that we can share generously the gifts we have freely received. So that we can go out and give ourselves to one another, receiving in turn the presence and the diversity of others as a gift and a source of enrichment in our lives.

At times it might seem that openness to the world draws us into the ring of competition, where, “man is a wolf to man”, and there is room only for conflict that divides us, tensions that exhaust us, hatred and enmity that get us nowhere (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 71-72).

The Mother of Mercy, like every good mother, tries to bring her family together. She whispers in our ear: “Look for your brother, look for your sister”. In this way, she opens to us the door to a new dawn, a new day. She brings us to its very doorstep, like that of the rich man in the Gospel (cf. *Lk 16:19-31*), where today children and families with bleeding wounds await us. Their wounds are not the wounds of Lazarus in the parable; they are the wounds of Jesus, and they are altogether real. In their pain and darkness, they cry out for us to bring to them the healing light of charity. For charity is the key that opens to us the door of heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters, in crossing this doorstep, may we experience the power that purifies our way of dealing with our neighbours. May Mary our Mother grant that we may regard their limits and faults with mercy and humility, thinking ourselves superior to no one (cf. *Phil 2:3*). As we contemplate the mysteries of the Rosary, let us ask Mary that we may be a community capable of proclaiming *Jesus Christ our hope*. And that, in this way, we can build a country capable of accepting everyone, of receiving from the Virgin Mother the gifts of dialogue and patience, of closeness and welcome, a country that loves, pardons and does not condemn (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 165). May we be a country that chooses to build bridges not walls, that prefers mercy not judgment.

May Mary always be the Gate of Dawn for this whole blessed land.

Allowing ourselves to be guided by Mary, let us now pray a decade of the Rosary, contemplating the third joyful mystery.

MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Square in front of the Cathedral (Vilnius)
Saturday, 22 September 2018

Good evening to all of you!

Thank you, Monica and Jonas, for your witness. I listened to it as a friend, as if we were sitting close to one another in some bar, telling one another about our lives as we drink a beer or a *girá* after going to the *jaunimo teatras*.

But your lives are not a piece of theatre; they are real and concrete, like those of everyone else gathered here today in this beautiful square situated between two rivers. Perhaps all this helps us to think back on your stories and to find in them the footprint of God... for God is always passing through our lives. He is always passing by. A great philosopher said: "I am afraid when God passes by! Afraid that I do not notice him!"

Like this Cathedral, you have times when you think you are falling apart, fires from which you think you can never rebuild. Think of all the times this Cathedral went up in flames and fell apart. Yet there were always people ready to start rebuilding; they refused to let themselves be overwhelmed by hardship: they never gave up. There is a lovely Alpine song that goes like this: "In the art of climbing, the secret lies not so much in not falling down, but in not staying fallen down". Always start over again, always, and that's how you will climb. Just like this Cathedral. The freedom of your nation, too, was won by men and women who did not flinch before terror and misfortune. Monica, your father's life, his condition and his death, and your illness, Jonas, could have been devastating for you. Yet here you are, sharing your experience, seeing it with the eyes of faith, and helping us to see that God gave you the grace to be strong, to lift yourselves up and to keep moving forward in life.

I ask myself: how was it that God's grace was poured out on you? Not

from the air, not magically; there is no magic wand for life. This happened through persons whose paths crossed your lives, good people who nourished you by their experience of faith. There are always people in life who give us a hand to help us pick ourselves up. For you, Monica, your grandmother and your mother, and the Franciscan parish, were like the confluence of these two rivers; just as the Vilnia flows into the Neris, you let yourself be carried along by that current of grace. Because the Lord saves us by making us part of a people. The Lord saves us by making us part of a people. He places us within a people, and our identity in the end, will be through our belonging to a people. No one can say, "I am saved on my own". We are all interconnected, we are all "networked". God wanted to enter into this web of relationships and he draws us to himself in community; he gives to our lives the deepest sense of identity and belonging (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 6). Jonas, you too found in others, in your wife and in the promise that you made on your wedding day, the reason to keep going, to fight, to live.

So don't let the world make you believe that it is better to do everything on your own. On your own, you never get there. Yes, you can manage to arrive at success in your life, but without love, without companions, without belonging to a people, without that beautiful experience of taking risks together. You can't move forward on your own. Don't yield to the temptation of getting caught up in yourself, only looking after yourself, being tempted to become selfish or superficial in the face of sorrow, difficulty or temporary success. Let us say once again, "Whatever happens to others happens to me". Let us swim against the current of that individualism which isolates us, makes us egocentric and makes us become vain, concerned only for our image and our own well-being. Concerned with our image, with how we look. Life in front of the mirror is no good, it is no good. On the other hand, life is beautiful with others, in our families, with friends, with the struggles of my people... That's how life is beautiful!

We are Christians and we want to aim for holiness. Aim for holiness through your encounters and your fellowship with other people; be attentive to their needs (*ibid.*, 146). Who we really are has to do with our being part of a people. Identity is not the product of a laboratory;

that does not exist; it is not concocted in a test tube; a “pure blood” identity: this does not exist. An identity *does* exist in walking together, of struggling together, of loving together. Identity does exist in belonging to a family, to a people. An identity does exist that gives you love, tenderness, concern for others... An identity does exist that gives you the strength to struggle and at the same time the tenderness to caress. Each one of us knows how beautiful it is to belong to a people, but also how tiring it is – it is great that young people get tired; it is a sign they are working – and even, at times, painful; you know this. But that is the basis of our identity; we are not rootless. We are not rootless people!

The two of you also spoke about your experience in a choir, praying in the family, Mass and catechism, and helping those in need. These are powerful weapons that the Lord gives us. *Prayer and song* keep us from getting caught up in this world alone: in your desire to know God you went out from yourselves and were able to see what was going on in your heart through God’s eyes (cf. *ibid.*, 147). In embracing music, you became open to listening and the interior life; in this way, you developed sensitivity, and that always opens the way to discernment (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris, Synod for Youth*, 162). Prayer can certainly be an experience of “spiritual warfare”, but it is in prayer that we learn to listen to the Spirit, to discern the signs of the times and to find renewed strength for proclaiming the Gospel each day. How else could we fight the temptation to become discouraged by our frailties and our difficulties, and those of others, and by all the dreadful things that happen in our world? What would we do if prayer did not teach us to believe that everything depends on us, when we are alone and wrestling with adversity? As Saint Alberto Hurtado used to say, “Jesus and I are an absolute majority!” Don’t forget this; a saint used to say it! The encounter with Christ, with his word, with the Eucharist, reminds us that it makes no difference how strong the opponent is. It makes no difference whether *Žalgiris Kaunas* or *Vilnius Rytas* are in first place [*laughter*] ... By the way, let me ask you: which one is in first place? It does not matter who is first, what matters is not the result, but the fact that the Lord is at our side.

Both of you also found support in life through the experience of *helping others*. You realized that all around us there are people experiencing troubles even worse than our own. Monica, you told us about working with children with disabilities. Seeing the frailty of others gives us perspective; it helps us not to go through life licking our wounds. It is no good living by complaining, it is just no good. It is no good living to lick our wounds. How many young people leave home for lack of opportunities, and how many are victims of depression, alcohol and drugs! You know all this, of course. How many of the elderly are lonely, without anyone to share the present, and fearful that the past will return! You, young people, can respond to these challenges by your presence, by your encounter with others. Jesus invites us to step out of ourselves and to risk a face-to-face encounter with others. It is true that believing in Jesus can often demand taking a leap of blind faith, and this can be frightening. At other times, it can make us question ourselves, and force us to abandon our preconceptions. That can involve anguish and we can be tempted to discouragement. But stand firm! Following Jesus is a passionate adventure that gives meaning to our lives and makes us feel part of a community that encourages us, a community that accompanies us, and commits us to the service of others. Dear young people, following Christ is something worthwhile, it is worthwhile! Do not be afraid to take part in the revolution to which he invites us: the revolution of tenderness (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88).

If life were a theatre piece or a video game, it would be limited to a precise time, and have a beginning and an end, when the curtain falls or one team wins the game. But life measures time differently, not with the time of a theatre piece or a video game; it follows God's heartbeat. Sometimes it passes quickly, while at other times it goes slowly. We are challenged to take new paths; things change. We grow indecisive mostly out of fear that the curtain will fall, or that the stopwatch will eliminate us from the game or prevent us from advancing. But life always involves moving forward, life moves forward, it does not stand still; life always involves moving forward, seeking the right way without being afraid to retrace our steps if we make a mistake. The most dangerous thing is to confuse the path with a maze that keeps us wandering in circles without

ever making real progress. Please, as young people, don't let yourselves get trapped in a maze, but follow a path that leads to the future. No mazes; only move forward!

Don't ever be afraid to put your trust in Jesus, to embrace his cause, the cause of the Gospel, the cause of humanity, of human beings. Because he never jumps off the ship of our life; he is always there at life's crossroads. Even when our lives go up in flame, he is always there to rebuild them. Jesus gives us plenty of time, lots of room for failure. Nobody has to emigrate from him; he has a place for everyone. There are many people out there who want to capture your hearts. They want to sow weeds in your field, but if, in the end, we entrust our lives to the Lord, the good grain will always prevail. In your testimony, Monica and Jonas, you spoke of your grandmother, your mother... I would like to say to you – and here I will stop, don't worry! – I would like to say to you: don't forget the roots of your people. Think of the past, speak with the elderly: it is not boring to speak with the elderly. Go and find the elderly and let them tell you about the roots of your people, their joys, their sufferings, their values. In this way, by drawing on your roots, you will carry your people forward, the history of your people, for greater fruitfulness. Dear young people, if you want a people who are great and free, take their memory from the roots of the past and carry your people forward. Thank you very much!

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Santakos Park in Kaunas
Sunday, 23 September 2018

Saint Mark devotes an entire section of his Gospel to the instruction of the Lord's disciples. It would seem that Jesus, at the halfway point of his journey to Jerusalem, wanted them to renew their choice to follow him, knowing that it would entail moments of trial and grief. The Evangelist describes this period of Jesus' life by mentioning that on three occasions he announced his passion. All three times, the disciples expressed bewilderment and opposition, and on each of these occasions the Lord wished to leave them a teaching. We have just heard about the second of these three occasions (cf. *Mk* 9:30-37).

The Christian life always involves experiences of the cross; at times they can seem interminable. Earlier generations still bear the scars of the period of the occupation, anguish at those who were deported, uncertainty about those who never returned, shame for those who were informers and traitors. The Book of Wisdom speaks to us of the just who are persecuted, who suffer insult and punishment solely for their goodness (cf. *Wis* 2:10-12). How many of you can identify at first hand, or in the history of some family member, with that passage which we just read? How many of you have also felt your faith shaken because God did not appear to take your side? Because the fact of your remaining faithful was not enough for him to intervene in your history? Kaunas knows about this; Lithuania as a whole can testify to it, still shuddering at the mention of Siberia, or the ghettos of Vilnius and Kaunas, among others. You can repeat the words of condemnation uttered by the apostle James in the passage of his Letter that we heard: they covet, they murder, they engage in disputes and conflicts (cf. 4:2).

The disciples did not want Jesus to speak to them of sorrows and the

cross; they wanted nothing to do with trials and hardships. Saint Mark tells us that they were interested in other things, that on the way home they discussed who was the greatest among them. Brothers and sisters: the thirst for power and glory is the sign of those who fail to heal the memories of the past and, perhaps for that very reason, to take an active part in the tasks of the present. They would rather discuss who was better, who acted with greater integrity in the past, who has more right to privileges than others. In this way, we deny our own history, “which is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 96). It is a fruitless and vain attitude that refuses to get involved in building the present, since it has lost contact with the struggles of our faithful people. We cannot be like those spiritual “sages” who only judge from afar and chatter constantly about “what ought to be done” (cf. *ibid.*).

Jesus, knowing what the disciples were discussing, provided them with an antidote to their struggles for power and their rejection of sacrifice. And to make his teaching all the more solemn, he sat down, as a teacher would, summoned them and set a child in their midst; the kind of child that would earn a penny for doing chores no one else would care to do. Whom would Jesus place in our midst today, here, on this Sunday morning? Who will be the smallest, the poorest in our midst, whom we should welcome a hundred years after our independence? Who is it that has nothing to give us, to make our effort and our sacrifices worthwhile? Perhaps it is the ethnic minorities of our city. Or the jobless who have to emigrate. May be it is the elderly and the lonely, or those young people who find no meaning in life because they have lost their roots.

“In their midst” means at the same distance from everybody, so that no one can claim not to notice, no one can argue that it is “somebody else’s responsibility” because “I didn’t see him”, or “I am further away”. And without anyone drawing attention to oneself, wanting to be applauded or singled out for praise.

There, in the city of Vilnius, the river Vilnia brought its waters and

lost its name to the Neris; here, the Neris itself loses its name bringing its waters to the Neman. This reminds us of what it means to be a Church on the move, unafraid to go out and get involved, even when it might seem that we pour ourselves out, lose ourselves, in going forth to the weak, the neglected, those dwelling at the margins of life. Yet also knowing that to go forth also means to halt at times, to set aside our worries and cares, and to notice, to listen to and to accompany those left on the roadside. At times, it will mean acting like the father of the prodigal son, who waited at the door for his return, to fling it open as soon as he arrived (cf. *ibid*, 46). At other times, like the disciples, we will need to learn that in welcoming a little child, we welcome Jesus himself.

That is why we are here today. We want to welcome Jesus, in his word, in the Eucharist, in his little ones. To welcome him so that he can heal our memory and accompany us in this present time that presents us with exciting challenges and signposts, so that we can follow him as his disciples. For there is nothing truly human that does not find an echo in the heart of Christ's disciples. We feel as our own the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and the afflictions of the people of our time, particularly the poor and the suffering (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1). For this reason, and because as a community we feel true and profound solidarity with all humanity – here in this city and throughout Lithuania - and its history (cf. *ibid.*), we wish to spend our lives in joyful service, and thus to make known to all that Jesus Christ is our one hope.

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ANGELUS

Santakos Park in Kaunas (Lithuania)
Sunday, 23 September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading, from the Book of Wisdom speaks of the persecution of the righteous, those whose "mere presence" annoys the ungodly. The ungodly are described as those who oppress the poor, who have no compassion for the widow and show no respect to the elderly (cf. 2:17-20). The ungodly claim to believe that "power is the norm of justice". They dominate the weak, use their power to impose a way of thinking, an ideology, a prevailing mindset. They use violence or repression to subject those who simply by their honest, straightforward, hardworking and companionable everyday life show that a different kind of world, a different kind of society, is possible. The ungodly are not content with doing anything they like, giving into their every whim; they do not want others, by doing good, to show them up for who they are. In the ungodly, evil is always trying to destroy good.

Seventy-five years ago, this nation witnessed the final destruction of the Vilnius Ghetto; this was the climax of the killing of thousands of Jews that had started two years earlier. As we read in the Book of Wisdom, the Jewish people suffered insults and cruel punishments. Let us think back on those times, and ask the Lord to give us the gift of discernment to detect in time any recrudescence of that pernicious attitude, any whiff of it that can taint the heart of generations that did not experience those times and can sometimes be taken in by such siren songs.

Jesus in the Gospel tells us of a temptation of which we have to be very careful: the desire for primacy and domination over others, which can dwell in every human heart. How often has it happened that one people considers itself superior, with greater acquired rights, with more privileges needing to be preserved or gained. What is the antidote that

Jesus proposes when this impulse appears in our heart or in the heart of any society or country? To be the last of all and the servant of all; to go to the place where no one else wants to go, where no one travels, the furthest peripheries; to serve and come to know the lowly and the rejected.

If power had to do with this, if we could allow the Gospel of Jesus Christ to reach the depths of our lives, then the “globalization of solidarity” would be a reality. “In our world, especially in some countries, different forms of war and conflict are re-emerging, yet we Christians remain steadfast in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2)” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 67).

Here in Lithuania, you have a hill of crosses, where thousands of people, over the centuries, have planted the sign of the cross. I ask you, as we now pray the *Angelus*, to beg Mary to help us all to plant our own cross, the cross of our service and commitment to the needs of others, on that hill where the poor dwell, where care and concern are needed for the outcast and for minorities. In this way, we can keep far from our lives and our cultures the possibility of destroying one another, of marginalizing, of continuing to discard whatever we find troublesome or uncomfortable.

Jesus puts a little child in our midst, at the same distance from each of us, so that all of us can feel challenged to respond. As we remember the “yes” spoken by Mary, let us ask her to make our “yes” as generous and fruitful as hers.

V. Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae.

R. Et concepit de Spiritu Sancto....

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MEETING WITH PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS, CONSECRATED PERSONS AND SEMINARIANS

Cathedral of Kaunas
Sunday, 23 September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good afternoon!

Before all else, I would like to say a word about what I am feeling. Looking out at you, I see many martyrs behind you. Anonymous martyrs, in the sense that we do not even know where they were buried. Also, one among you: I greeted one who knew what it meant to be in prison. A word comes to mind at the outset: *do not forget, remember*. You are the children of martyrs, that is your strength. And may the spirit of the world not tell you something different than what your forebears experienced. Remember your martyrs and follow their example: they were not afraid. Speaking with Bishops, your Bishops, today, they said: “What can we do to introduce the cause of beatification for the many for whom we have no documents, but we know that they are martyrs?” It is comforting, it is good to hear this: the concern for those who gave us their witness. They are saints.

The Bishop [Linas Vodopjanovas, OFM, in charge of consecrated life] spoke without any nuances – that’s how Franciscans speak: “Today, often, in various ways, our faith gets put to the test”, he said. He was not thinking of persecution by dictators, no. “After having answered the call of a vocation, we often no longer experience joy, neither in prayer nor in community life”.

The spirit of secularization, of boredom with everything concerning the community, is the temptation of the next generation. Our fathers and mothers struggled, suffered, were imprisoned and we perhaps do not have the strength to go forward. Take this into account!

The Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us: “Do not forget the former days.

Do not forget your elders” (cf. 10:32-39). This is the plea that I wish to make to you at the outset.

My entire visit to your country has been summed up in one expression: “Jesus Christ, our hope”. Now, as this day draws to its close, we have heard a text of the apostle Paul that invites us to hope with perseverance. Paul tells us this after having proclaimed to us God’s dream for every human being, and indeed for all creation: “God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him” (*Rom* 8:28). He “straightens” all things: that would be the literal translation.

Today I would like to share with you some aspects of this hope: aspects that we – as priests, seminarians, consecrated men and women – are asked to embody in our lives.

First, before his invitation to hope, Paul repeats three times the word “groan”: creation groans, men and women groan, the Spirit groans within us (cf. *Rom* 8:22-23.26). This groaning comes from an enslavement of corruption, from a yearning for fulfilment. Today we would do well to ask if we ourselves groan inwardly, or whether our hearts are still, no longer yearning for the living God. As your Bishop was saying: “We no longer experience joy in prayer or in community life”.

Ours should be the longing of the deer for springs of water as we seek God’s mystery, his truth and his beauty. Dear friends, we are not “God’s bureaucrats”! Perhaps our “prosperous society” keeps us sated, surrounded by services and material objects; we end up “stuffed” with everything and filled by nothing. Perhaps it keeps us distracted and entertained, but not fulfilled. Even worse: sometimes we no longer feel hunger. As men and women of special consecration, we can never afford to lose that inward groaning, that restlessness of heart that finds its rest in the Lord alone (Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, I,1.1). The restlessness of the heart. No instant news, no virtual communication can substitute for our need of concrete, prolonged and regular moments – calling for sustained effort – our need of daily dialogue with the Lord through prayer and adoration. We need to keep cultivating our desire for God, as Saint John of the Cross wrote. This is what he said: “Try to

be continuous in prayer, and in the midst of bodily exercises, do not leave it. Whether you eat, drink, talk with others, or do anything, always go to God and attach your heart to him” (*Counsels to a Religious on How to Attain Perfection*, 9b).

This groaning can also come from our contemplation of the world around us, as a protest against the unsatisfied needs of our poorest brothers and sisters, before the absence of meaning in the lives of our young, the loneliness experienced by the elderly, the misuse of creation. It is a groaning that would mobilize efforts to shape events in our nation, in our cities, not by acting as a pressure group or in a bid for power, but in service to all. We too should be moved by the cry of our people, like Moses before the burning bush, when God spoke to him of the suffering of his people (cf. *Ex 3:9*). Listening to God’s voice in prayer makes us see, makes us hear and feel the pain of others, in order to set them free. Yet we should also be concerned when our people stop groaning, when they stop seeking water to quench their thirst. At those times, we need to discern what is silencing the voice of our people.

The cry that makes us turn to God in prayer and adoration is the same that makes us sensitive to the plea of our brothers and sisters. They put their “hope” in us, and they require us to discern carefully and then to organize, boldly and creatively, our apostolic outreach. May our presence not be haphazard but one that can genuinely respond to the needs of God’s people, and thus be leaven in the dough (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33).

The apostle also speaks of *perseverance*: constancy in suffering and in the pursuit of goodness. This calls for our being centred in God, firmly rooted in him and faithful to his love.

The older among you – and here how can I fail to mention Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevičius – know what it is to bear witness to this constancy in suffering, this “hoping against hope” (cf. *Rom 4:18*). The violence you endured for your defence of civil and religious freedom, the violence of slander, imprisonment and deportation, could not prevail over your faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of history. You have much to tell us and teach us. Yet you also have much advice to give,

without the need to pass judgement on the apparent limitations of the young. And you, the young, when you meet with little frustrations that can discourage you and make you want to turn in on yourselves, seeking activities and pastimes at odds with your consecration, go back to your roots and consider the path taken by your elders. I see that there are young people here. I am repeating this, because some are young. And you, younger ones, when faced with the little frustrations that discourage you, you tend to close in on yourselves, to resort to behaviour and escapism that is not consistent with your consecration. Seek out your roots and keep to the path that your elders walked. It is better to take a different path than that you live in mediocrity. That was for the young. You are still in time, and the door is still open. It is tribulation that brings out what is distinctive about Christian hope. For when our hope is merely human, we can become frustrated and end in failure. That does not happen with Christian hope: it is renewed and purified when tested by tribulation.

It is true that we are living in different times and situations, but it is also true that this advice proves most helpful when those who experienced those hardships do not keep them to themselves but share them with others. Their stories are simply expressions of nostalgia for times past, as if they were somehow better, or veiled criticisms of those who have a more fragile emotional makeup. A community of disciples can draw upon great resources of constancy if it can integrate – like the scribe in the Gospel – both new and old (cf. *Mt* 13:52), if it is conscious that historical experiences are the roots that enable the tree to grow and flourish.

Finally, looking to Jesus Christ as our hope means *identifying ourselves with him, sharing as a community in his lot*. For the apostle Paul, the salvation we await is not merely negative: freedom from some internal or external, historical or eschatological tribulation. Paul instead speaks of it as something supremely positive: our sharing in the glorious life of Christ (cf. *1 Thess* 5:9-10), our sharing in his glorious kingdom (cf. *2 Tim* 4:18), the redemption of our bodies (cf. *Rom* 8:23-24). Each of you should try to glimpse the mysterious and unique plan that God has for him or her, for each one of us. For no one can ever

know us as profoundly as God does. He calls us to something apparently impossible; he gambles on us, trusting that we will reflect the image of his Son. He expects much of us, and we put our hope in him.

Us: That “us” includes, but also exceeds, each of us as an individual. The Lord calls us, justifies us and glorifies us together, and with us, he includes all creation. Often we so stress personal responsibility that our responsibility as a community ends up in the background, no more than a backdrop. But the Holy Spirit gathers us, reconciles our differences and generates new energies to advance the Church’s mission (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 131, 235).

This Cathedral in which we are gathered is dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul. Both these apostles were conscious of the treasure they had received; both, at different moments and in different ways, had been asked to “put out into the deep water” (*Lk* 5:4). All of us are in the boat that is the Church. We too want constantly to *cry out* to God, to *persevere* amid tribulation and to hold fast to Jesus Christ as the *object of our hope*. And this boat sees it as central to her mission to proclaim the eagerly-awaited glory that is God present in the midst of his people in the risen Christ, a glory that one day, to fulfil the yearning of all creation, will be revealed in the children of God. This is the challenge that impels us: the mandate to evangelize. This is the basis of our hope and our joy.

How often we encounter priests, religious men and women, who are sad. *Spiritual sadness* is an illness. They are sad because they do not know... Sad because they do not find love, because they have not fallen in love with the Lord. They left aside a married life, family life, because they wanted to follow the Lord. But now they seem tired... And then sadness descends on them. Please, when you find yourselves sad, stop. And seek out a wise priest, a wise sister. Not wise because they have university degrees, no, not for that reason. Wise because they have been able to move forward in love. Go and ask for counsel. When that sadness starts, we can predict that if it is not cured in time, it will turn you into sad old spinsters and bachelors, men and women who are not

fruitful. And of this sadness you should be afraid! It is the devil who sows this.

Today, the “deep water” into which we must “put out” is “the changing scenarios and ever new challenges” of this Church on the move. Yet we need to ask once more: What is it that the Lord is asking of us? Which are the peripheries that most need our presence so that we can bring them the light of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20)?

Otherwise, if you do not reflect the joy of a vocation, who will be able to believe that Jesus Christ is our hope? Only the example of our lives will show the reason for our hope in him.

There is something else linked to sadness: confusing a vocation with a business, with a company. “I am employed here, I work here, I am enthusiastic in this... and I am happy because I have this”. But tomorrow a bishop comes along, another one or the same one, or another superior, and says to you: “No, stop doing that and come this way”. It is the moment of defeat. Why? Because in that moment you will realize that you have gone down a dubious path. You will realize that the Lord, who called you for love, is disappointed by you, because you preferred to become a wheeler-dealer. At the outset I said to you that the life of one who follows Jesus is not that of a bureaucrat: it is a life of loving the Lord, and of apostolic zeal for his people. Let me give you a caricature: what does a priest bureaucrat do? He has his schedule, his office hours, he opens the office at that hour, does his work, closes the office... and the people are outside. He does not draw close to the people.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, if you do not wish to be bureaucrats, let me give you a word: *closeness!* Closeness, nearness. Closeness to the Tabernacle, a heart-to-heart with the Lord. And closeness to the people. “But, Father, the people do not come...”. Go out and find them! “But, the youth of today do not come...”. Make up something new: an oratory, for accompanying them, helping them. Closeness to the people. And closeness to the Lord in the Tabernacle. The Lord wants you to be pastors of his people, and not clerks of the state! Later I will say something to the sisters, but later...

Closeness means mercy. On this earth, where Jesus was revealed as the merciful Jesus, a priest cannot *not* be merciful. Especially in the confessional. Think of how Jesus would welcome this person [who comes to confession]. Life has already beaten him down, poor thing! Let them feel the embrace of the Father who forgives. If you cannot give them absolution, for example, give them the consolation of a brother, of a father. Encourage them to go on. Convince them that God forgives everything. But do this with a father's warmth. Never chase someone from the confessional! Never chase them away. "Look, you can't... I can't right now, but God loves you, you pray, come back, and we'll speak...". Like that. Closeness. This is being a father. Is that sinner whom you are sending way not important to you? I am not speaking about you, because I do not know you. I am speaking about other situations. And mercy. The confessional is not a psychiatrist's rooms. The confessional is not for digging into a person's heart.

And for this reason, dear priests, closeness for you also means having mercy in your very being. And the being of mercy, do you know where you get this from? There, at the Tabernacle.

And you, dear sisters... Often we see good sisters – all sisters are good – but who gossip and gossip and gossip... Ask that one in the front row on the other side – the second last one – if in prison she had time for gossiping, while she was sowing gloves. Ask her. Please, be mothers! Be mothers, because you are the icon of the Church and of Our Lady. And every person who sees you, may they see Mother Church and Mother Mary. Do not forget this. And Mother Church is not an "old spinster". Mother Church does not gossip: she loves, serves, helps others to grow. Your closeness is the way to be a mother: as icon of the Church and icon of Our Lady.

Closeness to the Tabernacle and prayer. That thirst of the soul which I spoke of, and with others. Priestly service and consecrated life not as bureaucrats, but as fathers and mothers of mercy. And if you do this, when you are elderly you will have a beautiful smile and shining eyes! Because you will have a soul full of tenderness, meekness, mercy, love, fatherhood and motherhood.

And pray for this poor bishop. Thank you!

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VISIT AND PRAYER

Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights
Sunday, 23 September 2018

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46)

Your cry, Lord, continues to resound. It echoes within these walls that recall of the sufferings endured by so many sons and daughters of this people. Lithuanians and those from other nations paid in their own flesh the price of the thirst for absolute power on the part of those who sought complete domination.

Your cry, O Lord, is echoed in the cry of the innocent who, in union with you, cry out to heaven. It is the Good Friday of sorrow and bitterness, of abandonment and powerlessness, of cruelty and meaninglessness that this Lithuanian people experienced as a result of the unrestrained ambition that hardens and blinds the heart.

In this place of remembrance, Lord, we pray that your cry may keep us alert. That your cry, Lord, may free us from the spiritual sickness that remains a constant temptation for us as a people: forgetfulness of the experiences and sufferings of those who have gone before us.

In your cry, and in the lives of all who suffered so greatly in the past, may we find the courage to commit ourselves decisively to the present and to the future. May that cry encourage us to not succumb to the fashions of the day, to simplistic slogans, or to efforts to diminish or take away from any person the dignity you have given them.

Lord, may Lithuania be a beacon of hope. May it be a land of memory and action, constantly committed to fighting all forms of injustice. May it promote creative efforts to defend the rights of all persons, especially those most defenceless and vulnerable. And may Lithuania be for all a teacher in the way to reconcile and harmonize diversity.

Lord, grant that we may not be deaf to the plea of all those who cry out to heaven in our own day.

MEETING WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Reception Hall of the Presidential Palace (Riga)
Monday, 24 September 2018

Mr President, Members of Government and State Authorities, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of Civil Society, Dear Friends,

I am grateful, Mr President, for your kind words of welcome, and for the invitation to visit Latvia that you extended to me during our meeting in the Vatican. I am happy to be here for the first time, both in Latvia and in this city, that, like the entire country, has known difficult social, political, economic and spiritual struggles, the fruit of past divisions and conflicts, yet today has become one of the principal cultural, political and shipping centres of the region. Your contributions to culture, art and music in particular are well known beyond your borders. And today I also was able to appreciate these on my arrival at the airport. With the words of the Psalmist, you can indeed say: “You have turned my mourning into dancing” (*Ps 30:12*). Latvia, the land of the Dainas, has turned its sorrows and pain into singing and dancing, and has sought to become a place of dialogue and encounter, of a coexistence that is peaceful and looks to the future.

This year you are celebrating the centenary of your nation’s independence, a significant moment for the life of society as a whole. You know all too well the price of that freedom, which you have had to win over and over again. It is a freedom made possible thanks to your roots that, as Zenta Maurina, who inspired so many of you, observed, “are in heaven”. Without this ability to look up, to appeal to greater horizons that remind us of that “transcendent dignity” with which all of us, as human beings, have been endowed (*cf. Address to the European Parliament, 25 November 2014*), the rebuilding of your nation would not have been possible. That spiritual capacity to see more deeply, as

expressed in small and daily gestures of solidarity, compassion and mutual assistance, has sustained you and in turn has given you the creativity needed to generate new social processes, despite the currents of reductionism and exclusion that always threaten the fabric of society.

I am happy to know that the Catholic Church, in cooperation with other Christian churches, is an important part of those roots. This cooperation shows that it is possible to build communion within differences. It happens when people are motivated to leave superficial conflicts behind and to see one another in their deeper dignity. Indeed, when we, as individuals and communities, learn to look beyond ourselves and our particular interests, then understanding and mutual commitment bear fruit in solidarity. Such solidarity, understood in its deepest and most challenging sense, becomes a way of making history in a region where conflicts, tensions and even groups once considered inimical can attain a multifaceted unity that gives rise to new life (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228). The Gospel has nourished the life of your people in the past; today it can continue to open new paths enabling you to face present challenges, to value differences and, above all, to encourage “com-union” between all.

The celebration of this centenary reminds us of how important it is to treasure Latvia’s freedom and independence. These are certainly a gift, but also a task for everyone. To work for liberty is to commit oneself to the integral and integrating development of individuals and the community. If today we can celebrate, it is due to all those who blazed trails and opened a door to the future, and bequeathed to you that same responsibility: to open a door to the future by looking to everything that stands at the service of life, of generating life.

At the conclusion of our meeting, we will go to the Freedom Monument, where children, young people and families will be present. They remind us that “the motherhood” of Latvia – analogously echoed in the theme of this Visit – is reflected in the ability to promote truly effective strategies centred more on the concrete faces of these families, elderly persons, children and young people, than in the primacy of economy over life. Latvia’s “motherhood” is also manifested in her

ability to generate employment opportunities, so that no one will need to be uprooted in order to build a future. The index of human development is likewise measured by the capacity to increase and multiply. The development of communities is not produced, much less measured, solely by the amount of goods or resources they possess, but rather by their desire to engender life and build for the future. This is only possible to the extent that they are rooted in the past, creative in the present, and confident and hopeful in looking to the future. Then too, it is measured by their capacity for self-sacrifice and commitment, in imitation of the example of past generations.

Mr President, dear friends: As I begin my pilgrimage in this land, I ask God to continue to accompany, bless and prosper the work of your hands in the service of this nation.

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ECUMENICAL PRAYER

Evangelical Lutheran Cathedral (Riga)
Monday, 24 September 2018

It is a great pleasure for me to meet with you in this land marked by a journey of recognition, cooperation and friendship between the different Christian churches, which have succeeded in building unity while preserving the unique and rich identity of each. I might say that this is a “lived ecumenism” that is one of Latvia’s special traits. Without a doubt, it is a reason for hope and thanksgiving.

I thank Archbishop Jānis Vanags for having opened his doors to us for this prayer meeting. For over eight hundred years, this cathedral has been home to the Christian life of this city, a faithful witness to all those brothers and sisters of ours who have come here to worship and pray, to sustain their hope in moments of trial and to find the courage to face times of great injustice and suffering. Today it welcomes us, so that the Holy Spirit can continue to weave bonds of communion between us and so make us weavers of unity in our cities, lest our differences turn into divisions. May the Holy Spirit arm us with the weapons of dialogue, understanding and desire for mutual recognition and fraternity (cf. *Eph* 6:13-18).

This cathedral is also home to one of the oldest organs in Europe, which at the time of its inauguration was the largest in the world. We can imagine how it accompanied the life, the creativity, the imagination and the devotion of all those who were moved by its sound. It has been the instrument of God and of men for lifting of eyes and hearts to heaven. Today it is a symbol of this city and its cathedral.

For those who live here, it is more than a monumental organ; it is part of the life, traditions and identity of this place. For tourists, though, it is a work of art to look at and to photograph. This is a recurring danger for all of us: from “residents” we can become “tourists”. We can take what gives us our very identity and turn it into a

curio from the past, a tourist attraction, a museum piece that recalls the achievements of earlier ages, an object of great historical value, but no longer one capable of thrilling the hearts of those who encounter it.

The same thing can happen with faith. We can stop feeling like “resident” Christians and become tourists. We could even say that our whole Christian tradition can run the same risk. The risk of ending up as a museum piece, enclosed within the walls of our churches, and no longer giving out a tune capable of moving the hearts and inspiring the lives of those who hear it. Nonetheless, as the Gospel we just heard tells us, our faith is not to be hidden away, but to be made known and to resound in the various sectors of society, so that all can contemplate its beauty and be illumined by its light (cf. *Lk 11:33*).

If the music of the Gospel is no longer heard in our lives, or becomes a mere period piece, it will no longer be capable of breaking through the monotony that stifles hope and makes all our activity fruitless.

If the music of the Gospel ceases to resonate in our very being, we will lose the joy born of compassion, the tender love born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that has its source in our knowledge that we have been forgiven and sent forth.

If the music of the Gospel ceases to sound in our homes, our public squares, our workplaces, our political and financial life, then we will no longer hear the strains that challenge us to defend the dignity of every man and woman, whatever his or her origin. We will become caught up in what is “mine”, neglecting what is “ours”: our common home, which is also our common responsibility.

If the music of the Gospel is no longer heard, we will lose the sounds that guide our lives to heaven and become locked into one of the worst ills of our day: loneliness and isolation. That illness takes hold in those who have no relationships; it can be seen in elderly persons abandoned to their fate, but also in young people lacking points of reference or opportunities for the future (cf. *Address to the European Parliament*, 25 November 2014).

“Father, that all may be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn*

17:21). These words, thank God, continue to echo in our midst. They are those of Jesus praying to the Father before his passion. As he looked ahead to his own cross, and the crosses of so many of our brothers and sisters, Jesus continued to pray to the Father. This constant and quiet prayer marks out a path for us; it shows us the way to follow. Immersed in this prayer, as believers in him and in his Church, we desire the communion of grace that corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity (cf. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, 9). And we discover there the only path possible for all ecumenism: that of confronting the cross of suffering experienced by so many young people, elderly persons and young children all too often exploited, lacking meaning in life, deprived of opportunities and suffering from loneliness. Jesus turning to his Father, and to us his brothers and sisters, continues to pray: "that all may be one".

Unity is something that our mission today continues to demand of us. This mission requires us to stop looking at past injuries and self-referential approaches in order to focus on the Master's prayer. Our mission is to ensure that the music of the Gospel continues to be heard in our public squares.

Some may well say that the times in which we live are complex, that the times are difficult. Others may think that in our societies Christians have less and less margins of action or influence for any number of reasons, such as secularism or individualism. This may not lead to a closed and defensive mentality, even an attitude of resignation. Certainly, we have to admit that these are not easy times, especially for our many brothers and sisters who today, in their flesh, experience exile and even martyrdom for the faith. Yet their witness makes us realize that the Lord continues to call us, asking us to live the Gospel radically, in joy and gratitude. If Christ deemed us worthy to live in these times, at this hour – the only hour we have – we cannot let ourselves be overcome by fear, nor allow this time to pass without living it fully with joyful fidelity. The Lord will give us the strength to make every age, every moment, every situation, an opportunity for communion and reconciliation with the Father and with our brothers and sisters, especially those nowadays considered inferior, worthy of being

discarded. If Christ considered us worthy to ensure that the melody of the Gospel be heard, can we fail to do so?

The unity to which the Lord calls us is always a “missionary” unity. It summons us to reach out to the heart of our peoples and cultures, to the postmodern society in which we live, “where new narratives and paradigms are being formed”, and in this way “to bring the word of Jesus to the inmost soul of our cities” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 74). We will carry out this ecumenical mission if we let ourselves be imbued by the Spirit of Jesus. He can “break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him; he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world” (*ibid.*, 11).

Dear brothers and sisters, may the music of the Gospel continue to resound in our midst. May its music never cease to inspire our hearts to dream and our eyes to contemplate the life that the Lord calls us, all of us, to live to the full. And to be his disciples in the midst of the world in which we are called to live.

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VISIT TO THE CATHOLIC SAINT JAMES' CATHEDRAL

Riga
Monday, 24 September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank the Archbishop for his kind words and his clear analysis of how things stand. Being in your presence, dear elderly brothers and sisters, reminds me of two phrases in the Letter of the Apostle Saint James, to whom this Cathedral is dedicated. At the beginning and at the end of his Letter, albeit using two different words, he encourages us to remain steadfast. I am certain that we can appreciate the message that James, the brother of the Lord, wants us to hear.

Those of you who are present were subjected to any number of trials: the horror of war, then political repression, persecution and exile, as your Archbishop has described. Yet you remained steadfast; you persevered in faith. Neither the Nazi regime, nor the Soviet regime could extinguish the faith in your hearts. Neither could they stop some of you from becoming priests, religious sisters, catechists, or from serving the Church in other ways that put your lives at risk. You fought the good fight; you ran the race, you kept the faith (cf. *2 Tm 4:7*).

Saint James stresses that this constancy in faith overcomes trials and produces perfect works (cf. *1:2-4*). Your work, however perfect in those days, must also tend to perfection in today's new situations. You, who devoted body and soul, who have given your life to winning freedom for your native land, now often find yourselves cast aside. Paradoxical as it may seem, nowadays, in the name of freedom, free men and women subject the elderly to solitude, abandonment, lack of assistance, social exclusion and even poverty. If that is the case, then the so-called train of freedom and progress has ended up with the very people who fought to gain those rights as its last car, onlookers at other people's party, honoured in words but forgotten in daily life (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*,

234).

St James tells you nonetheless to persevere, not to give up. “Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 163). Do not yield to disappointment or grief. Do not lose your gentleness, much less your hope.

At the end of his Letter, Saint James once more exhorts us to be patient (5:7). There, he uses a word that implies both patient endurance and patient expectation. In your families and your homeland, I encourage you to be also an example of both these attitudes: patient endurance and patient expectation, both marked by patience. In this way you will continue to build your people.

Because of your length of years, you are living witnesses of perseverance in the face of adversity, but also a prophetic gift to remind younger generations that the care and protection of those who have gone before us is loved and valued by God, and cries out to God when it is disregarded.

Because of your length of years, do not forget that you are the roots of a people, the roots of young shoots that need to flourish and bear fruit. Protect those roots; keep them alive, so that children and young people can be grafted onto them and come to understand that “all the blossoms on the tree draw life from lies buried beneath”(F. L. Bernárdez, Sonnet *Si para recobrar lo recobrado*).

The words inscribed on the pulpit of this Cathedral say: “O that today you might hear his voice! Harden not your hearts” (cf. *Ps* 95:7-8). A hardened heart is one that has become sclerotic and lost the joy of God’s constant newness. May we never cease to be young of heart, to taste and see the goodness of the Lord, always, to the very end of our days (cf. *Ps* 34:9).

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Shrine of the Mother of God, Aglona (Latvia)
Monday, 24 September 2018

Truly, we can say that what Saint Luke tells us at the beginning of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is being repeated here today: we are joined together in prayer, in the company of Mary our Mother (cf. *Acts* 1:14). Today we make our own the theme of this Visit: “Show yourself as Mother!” Show us, Mother, where you continue to sing your *Magnificat*. Show us the places where your Son is crucified, that we may encounter your steady presence at the foot of the cross.

The Gospel of John speaks of only two moments when the life of Jesus intersects with that of his Mother: the wedding feast at Cana (cf. *Jn* 2:1-12) and the account we have just read, where Mary stands beneath the cross (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27). Perhaps the Evangelist wants to show us the Mother of Jesus in these two apparently opposite situations in life – the joy of a wedding feast and sorrow at the death of a child. In her growing understanding of the mystery of the Word, Mary points us to the Good News that the Lord wants to share with us today.

The first thing John mentions is that Mary “stands near the cross of Jesus”, close to her Son. She stood there, at the foot of the cross, with unwavering conviction, fearless and immovable. This is the main way that Mary *shows herself* – she stands near those who suffer, those from whom the world flees, including those who have been put on trial, condemned by all, deported. Nor is it that they are simply oppressed or exploited; they are completely “outside the system”, on the very fringes of society (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 53). The Mother also stands close by them, steadfast beneath their cross of incomprehension and suffering.

Mary also *shows us* how to “stand near” these situations; it demands more than simply passing by or making a quick visit, engaging in a kind

of “tourism of solidarity”. Rather, it means that those in painful situations should feel us standing firmly at their side and on their side. All those discarded by society can experience the Mother who remains discreetly near them, for in their sufferings she sees the open wounds of her Son Jesus. She learned this at the foot of the cross. We too are called to “touch” the sufferings of others. Let us go out to meet our people, to console them and accompany them. Let us not be afraid to experience the power of tenderness, to get involved and let our lives become complicated for the sake of others (cf. *ibid*, 270). Like Mary, let us remain steadfast, our hearts at peace in God. Let us be ever ready to lift up the fallen, raise up the lowly and to help end all those situations of oppression that make people feel crucified themselves.

Jesus asks Mary to receive the beloved disciple as her son. The text tells us that they stood together at the foot of the cross, but Jesus realized that this was not enough, that they had not yet fully “received” one another. For we can stand at the side of many people, even sharing the same home, neighbourhood or workplace; we can share the faith, contemplate and experience the same mysteries, but without embracing or actually “receiving” them with love. How many married couples could speak of lives lived next to one another, but not together; how many young people feel pained by the distance separating them from adults; how many elderly people feel tolerated, but not lovingly cared for and accepted.

Certainly, when we open ourselves to others, we can get badly hurt. In political life, too, past conflicts between peoples can painfully come to the fore. Mary *shows herself* to be a woman open to forgiveness, to setting aside resentment and suspicion. She does not dwell on “what might have been”, had her Son’s friends, or the priests of his people and their rulers, acted differently. She does not give in to frustration or helplessness. Mary trusts Jesus and receives his disciple, for the relationships that heal us and free us are those that open us to encounter and fraternity with others, in whom we find God himself (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 92). Bishop Sloskans, who rests here, after being arrested and sent away, wrote to his parents: “I beg you from the bottom of my heart: do not let vengeance or exasperation find a way

into your hearts. If we permitted that to happen, we would not be true Christians, but fanatics”. Sometimes we see a return to ways of thinking that would have us be suspicious of others, or would show us with statistics that we would be better off, more prosperous and more secure just by ourselves. At those times, Mary and the disciples of these lands invite us to “receive” our brothers and sisters, to care for them, in a spirit of universal fraternity.

Mary also *shows herself* as the woman who is willing to *be* received, who humbly lets herself become part of the disciple’s world. At the wedding feast, when the lack of wine might have left the celebration full of rituals but drained of love and joy, she commanded the servants to do what Jesus told them (cf. *Jn* 2:5). Now, as an obedient disciple, she is willing to accept, to go along with, the pace of someone younger than herself. Harmony is always difficult when we are different, when our differences of age, life experiences and circumstances lead us to feel, think and act in ways that, at first sight, seem opposed. When, in faith, we listen to the command to receive and be received, it becomes possible to build unity in diversity, for differences neither restrain nor divide us, but allow us to look more deeply and to see others in their most profound dignity, as sons and daughters of the same Father (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228).

In this Eucharist, as in every Eucharist, we recall the day of Golgotha. From the foot of the cross, Mary invites us to rejoice that we have been received as her sons and daughters, even as her Son Jesus invites us to receive her into our own homes and to make her a part of our lives. Mary wants to give us her courage, so that we too can remain steadfast, and her humility, so that, like her, we can adapt to whatever life brings. In this, her Shrine, she begs that all of us may recommit ourselves to welcoming one another without discrimination. In this way, all in Latvia may know that we are willing to show preference to the poor, to raise up those who have fallen, and to receive others just as they come, just as they are.

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MEETING WITH THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

Rose Garden of the Presidential Palace (Tallinn)
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Madam President, Members of Government and State Authorities, Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to meet with you here in Tallinn, the northernmost capital that the Lord has allowed me to visit. I thank you, Madam President, for your words of welcome and for this opportunity to meet the representatives of the people of Estonia. I know that among you there is also a delegation from the sectors of civil society and from the world of culture. This allows me to express to them my desire to learn more about your culture, and especially the capacity for resilience that has enabled you to begin anew in the face of so many situations of adversity.

For centuries these lands have been known as “the Land of Mary”, *Maarjmaa*. A name that is not simply part of your history, but also part of your culture. Thinking of Mary reminds me of two words: memory and fruitfulness. Mary is a woman of memory who treasures all living things in her heart (cf. *Lk 2:19*) and the fruitful mother who begets the life of her Son.

Hence, I would like to think of Estonia as a land of memory and of fruitfulness.

A land of memory

Your people had to endure, at different times in history, moments of bitter suffering and tribulation. Struggles for a freedom and independence that was constantly disputed or threatened. Nonetheless, in the last twenty-five years or so – since you once again took your proper place in the family of nations – Estonian society has taken “giant

steps” forward. Your country, despite its small size, is a leader as concerns the indices of human development and the capacity for innovation; it also ranks high in the areas of freedom of the press, democracy and political freedom. You have also forged bonds of cooperation and friendship with a number of countries. As you consider your past and present, you have good reason to look to the future with hope and to confront new challenges. To be a land of memory is to keep remembering that what you have attained today is due to the efforts, the hard work, the spirit and the faith of your predecessors. Cultivating a grateful memory makes it possible for you to identify today’s achievements as the fruit of a history made up of all those men and women who strove to make freedom possible. In turn, it challenges you to honour them by blazing new trails for generations yet to come.

A land of fruitfulness

As I observed at the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, “in our time, humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people’s welfare” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 52). Still, we do well never to forget that “the good life” and a life well lived are not the same thing.

One of the evident effects of technocratic societies is a loss of meaning in life and the joy of living. As a result, slowly and silently the capacity for wonder is dampened, often leaving citizens in an existential ennui. A sense of belonging and commitment to others, of being rooted in a people, a culture and a family, can gradually be lost, depriving the young in particular of their roots and the foundations needed to build their presence and their future. Depriving them of the capacity to dream, to risk and to create. To put all our “trust” in technological progress, as the only way possible, can lead to a loss of the capacity to create interpersonal, intergenerational and intercultural bonds. Ultimately, that vital fabric so important for us to feel part of one another and share in a common project in the broadest sense of the word. Consequently, one of the most important obligations incumbent on all of us who have social, political, educational and religious

responsibilities has to do precisely with how we can keep building bonds.

A land of fruitfulness demands contexts in which roots can be planted and give rise to a vital network capable of ensuring that the members of its communities feel “at home”. There is no worse form of alienation than to feel uprooted, belonging to no one. A land will be fruitful, and its people bear fruit and give birth to the future, only to the extent that it can foster a sense of belonging among its members, create bonds of integration between generations and different communities; and avoid all that make us insensitive to others and lead to further alienation. In this effort, dear friends, I wish to assure you that you can count always on the support and help of Catholic Church, a small community in your midst, yet one most desirous of contributing to the fruitfulness of this land.

Madam President, Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you once more for your welcome and hospitality. May the Lord bless you and the beloved Estonian people. In a special way, may he bless the elderly and the young, so that, by cherishing memory and upholding it, they may make this land a model of fruitfulness. Thank you.

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ECUMENICAL MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Kaarli Lutheran Church (Tallinn)
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Dear Young Friends,

Thank you for your warm welcome, for your songs and for the testimonies of Lisbel, Tauri and Mirko. I am grateful to the Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Urmas Viilma, for his kind and fraternal words of welcome, and for the presence of Archbishop Andres Põder, President of the Estonian Council of Churches, of Bishop Philippe Jourdan, Apostolic Administrator in Estonia, and of representatives from the different Christian communities in the country. I am also grateful for the presence of Madam President of the Republic.

It is always good to meet, to share our life stories, and to share with one another our thoughts and hopes; it is wonderful, too, for us to come together as believers in Jesus Christ. These meetings bring to fulfilment that dream of Jesus at the Last Supper: “That they may all be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*). If we try to see ourselves as pilgrims journeying together, we will learn to entrust our heart to our travelling companions without fear and distrust, looking only to what we all truly seek: peace in the presence of the one God. Just as crafting peace is an art, so too, learning to trust one another is also an art and a source of happiness: “Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Mt 5:9*). And we do not make this path, this journey, with believers alone, but with everyone. Everyone has something to say to us. We have something to say to everyone.

The great painting in the apse of this church contains a phrase from the Gospel of Saint Matthew: “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*Mt 11:28*). You, as young Christians, can identify with some of the things going on in this section of the Gospel.

Just before Jesus speaks those words, Matthew tells us that he was saddened because he felt that those who heard him simply did not understand what he was trying to say (cf. *Mt 11:16-19*). Frequently you too, as young people, can feel that the adults around you do not appreciate your hope and desires; sometimes, when they see you very happy, they get suspicious; and if they see you anxious about something, they downplay it. In the consultation prior to the forthcoming Synod on young people, many of you expressed the desire to have a companion along the way, someone who can understand you without judging and can listen and answer your questions (cf. *Synod on Young People, Instrumentum Laboris*, 132). Our Christian churches – and I would say this of every institutionally structured religious organization – at times bring attitudes that make it easier for us to talk, give advice, speak from our own experience, rather than listen, rather than be challenged and learn from what you are experiencing. Christian communities often close themselves off, without being aware of it, and do not listen to your concerns. We know that you want and expect “to be accompanied not by an unbending judge, or by a fearful and hyper-protective parent who generates dependence, but by someone who is not afraid of his weakness and is able to make the treasure it holds within, like an earthen vessel, shine (cf. *2 Cor 4:7*)” (ibid., 142). Today, I am here to tell you that we want to mourn with you when you mourn, to accompany and support you, to share in your joys, and to help you to be followers of the Lord. You, young people, you should know this: when a Christian community is truly Christian, it does not proselytize. Only listening, welcoming, accompanying and moving forward; but imposing nothing.

Jesus goes on to complain about the cities he visited, where he worked great miracles and demonstrated signs of great tenderness and closeness, and was displeased at their inability to see that the change he came to bring was urgent and not to be delayed. He even says that they are more stubborn and obdurate than Sodom (cf. *Mt 11:20-24*). When we adults refuse to acknowledge some evident reality, you tell us frankly: “Can’t you see this?” Some of you who are a bit more forthright might even say to us: “Don’t you see that nobody is listening to you any

more, or believes what you have to say?” We ourselves need to be converted; we have to realize that in order to stand by your side we need to change many situations that, in the end, put you off.

We know – and you have told us – that many young people do not turn to us for anything because they don’t feel we have anything meaningful to say to them. It is bad, when a Church, a community, behaves in such a way that young people think: “These ones have nothing to say to me that will be useful in my life”. In fact, some of them expressly ask us to leave them alone, because they feel the Church’s presence as bothersome or even irritating. This is true. They are upset by sexual and economic scandals that do not meet with clear condemnation, by our unpreparedness to really appreciate the lives and sensibilities of the young, and simply by the passive role we assign them (cf. *Synod on Young People, Instrumentum Laboris*, 66). These are just a few of your complaints. We want to respond to them; as you yourselves put it, we want to be a “transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive community” (ibid. 67), that is, a community without fear. Fear imprisons us. Fear drives us to proselytize. But fraternity is something else: an open heart and a fraternal embrace.

In the verses that immediately precede the words of the Gospel quoted in the painting above us, Jesus breaks out in praise of the Father. He does so because he realizes that those who did understand, who did grasp the meaning of his message and his person, are the little ones, the ones who have simple, open souls. Seeing all of you like this, gathered as one and singing together, I add my own voice to that of Jesus and I marvel that, for all our lack of witness, you continue to discover Jesus in our communities. Because we know that where Jesus is, there is always renewal; there are always new opportunities for conversion and for leaving behind everything that separates us from him and our brothers and sisters. Where Jesus is, life always has the flavour of the Holy Spirit. You, here today, reflect something of the marvel that Jesus felt.

So yes, let us repeat his words: “Come to me, all who labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*Mt 11:28*). But let us say them in the conviction that, beyond all our limitations and divisions, Jesus is still the reason for our being here. We know no greater peace of mind can be found than by letting Jesus carry our burdens. We also know that many people still do not know him, and live in sadness and confusion. A famous singer of yours, about ten years ago said in one of her songs: “Love is dead, love is gone, love don’t live here anymore” (Kerli Kõiv, *Love is Dead*). No, please! Let us ensure that love is alive, and all of us must do this! Many people have that experience: they see that their parents no longer love one another, that the love of newlyweds soon fades. They see a lack of love in the fact that nobody cares that they have to migrate to look for work, or look askance at them because they are foreigners. It might seem that love is dead, as Kerli Kõiv said, but we know that it is not, and that we have a word to say, a message to bring, with few words and many actions. For you are a generation of images, a generation of action, more than speculation and theory.

And that is how Jesus likes it, because he went about doing good, and when dying he preferred the striking message of the cross over mere words. We are united by our faith in Jesus, and he is waiting for us to bring him to all those young people whose lives are no longer meaningful. And the risk, even for us believers, is that we lose the meaning of our lives. And this happens when we believers are inconsistent. Let us accept together that newness that God brings to our life, that newness that impels us to set out anew to all those places where humanity is most wounded. Wherever men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life’s meaning. Yet we will never go alone: God comes with us; he is unafraid, “unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. *Phil 2:6-8; Jn 1:14*). So if we dare to leave ourselves behind – our selfishness, our narrow-minded ideas – and go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 135).

Dear young people, love is not dead. It calls us and sends us forth. It asks us only to open our hearts. Let us ask for the apostolic strength to bring the Gospel to others – but to offer it, not impose it –and to resist the tendency to see our Christian life as if it were a museum of memories. The Christian life is our life, our future, our hope! It is not a museum. May the Holy Spirit help us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus, so that the Church, so that our Churches will be able to continue to welcome the Lord’s surprises (cf. *ibid*, 139), and the youthfulness, joy and beauty that Mirko was speaking about, of the Bride who goes forth to meet her Lord. The surprises of the Lord. The Lord surprises us because life always surprises us. Let us go forward, to meet these surprises. Thank you!

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MEETING WITH THOSE ASSISTED BY THE CHARITABLE WORKS OF THE CHURCH

Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul (Tallinn)
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for welcoming me to your home this afternoon. I think it is important to make this visit and to spend time here with you. Thank you for your witness and for sharing with us all the things closest to your heart.

First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Marina, and your husband, for the beautiful testimony that you gave us. You have been blessed with nine children, with all the sacrifices that that entails, as you clearly told us. Wherever there are children and young people, many sacrifices have to be made, but even more important, there is future, joy and hope. So it is comforting to hear you say: “We thank the Lord for the communion and the love that reigns in our house”. In this land, where the winters are bitter, you do not lack the most important warmth, that of the home, the warmth born from being together as a family. With disagreements and problems? Yes, certainly! But also the hope and desire to move forward together. Yours are not just pretty words, but a clear example.

Thank you too, for sharing the testimony of those sisters who were not afraid to go out to where you were, in order to be a sign of the closeness and the outstretched hand of our God. You said that they were like angels who came to you. That is how it is: they are like angels.

When faith is unafraid to leave comfort behind, to take a risk and dare to take a step, it shows the clear meaning of those beautiful words of the Master: “that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (*Jn* 13:34). With a love that shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate, and instead builds bridges. With a love that enables us to

create one big family, where all of us can feel at home, as in this home. With a love that exudes compassion and dignity. And this is beautiful. [He looks at Marina's nine children sitting on a single bench, and counts them]. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Beautiful family! Beautiful family!

A faith that is missionary goes, like these sisters, through the streets of our cities, our neighbourhoods and our communities, telling people with very concrete actions: You are part of our family, of God's big family in which all of us have a place. Don't stay outside. And you, sisters, you are doing this! Thank you.

I believe that that is the miracle that you, Vladimir, talked to us about. You met brothers and sisters who made it possible for your heart to be stirred and to realize that the Lord never stopped tirelessly seeking you, to clothe for his party (cf. *Lk 15:22*), to realize with joy that each one of us is his beloved son or daughter. The greatest joy of the Lord is to see us reborn. That is why he keeps giving us new opportunities, new chances. We see how important relationships are, feeling that we belong to one another, that all life is valuable, and that we are prepared to stake our lives on that.

So I would invite you to continue creating bonds. To continue going out into the neighbourhoods and saying to all sorts of people: "You, and you and you, are part of our family!" Jesus called the disciples, and today too he calls each of us, dear brothers and sisters, to continue sowing seeds of his Kingdom, passing it on. He's counting on your histories, your lives and your hands, to go through the city and to share the same experience you have had. Today, can Jesus count on you? Each of you needs to answer.

Thank you for this time you have given me. Thank you for your words of witness. I would now like to give you my blessing, so that the Lord can continue to work miracles through your hands. And please, I also need help; please, don't forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Freedom Square, Tallin
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

In listening to the first reading, the account of the coming of the Jewish people – now freed from slavery in Egypt – to Mount Sinai (*Ex* 19:1), it is impossible not to think of you as a people. It is impossible not to think about the entire nation of Estonia and all the Baltic States! How can we not think of your part in the Singing Revolution, or in the human chain of two million people extending from here to Vilnius? You know what it is to struggle for freedom; you can identify with that people. We would do well, then, to listen to what God says to Moses, in order to discern what he is saying to us as a people.

The people who came to Mount Sinai had already seen the love of their God expressed in miracles and powerful signs. They were a people who had entered into a covenant of love, because God loved them first and made his love known to them. They did not have to do so; God wants our love to be free. When we say that we are Christians, when we embrace a way of life, we do so without pressure, without it being a kind of trade-off, in which we remain faithful if God keeps his promise. First, we know that God's promise does not take anything away from us; rather, it leads to the fulfilment of all our human aspirations. Some people think they are free when they live without God or keep him at arm's length. They do not realize that, in doing so, they pass through this life as orphans, without a home to return to. "They cease being pilgrims and become drifters, flitting around themselves and never getting anywhere" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 170).

Like the people who came forth from Egypt, we have to *listen and seek*. These days, we may think that the strength of a people is measured by other means. Some people speak in a loud voice, full of

self-assurance – with no doubts or hesitation. Others shout and hurl threats about using weapons, deploying troops and implementing strategies... That way they appear to be stronger. But this is not about “seeking” the will of God, but about gaining power so as to prevail over others. Underlying this attitude is a rejection of ethics and, as such, a rejection of God. For ethics leads us to a God who calls for a free and committed response to others and to the world around us, a response outside the categories of the marketplace (cf. *ibid.*, 57). You did not gain your freedom in order to end up as slaves of consumerism, individualism or the thirst for power or domination.

God knows our needs, those we often hide behind our desire for possessions. He also knows the insecurities we try to overcome through power. Jesus, in the Gospel we just heard, encourages us to overcome that thirst within our hearts by coming to him. He is the one who can give us fulfilment by the abundance of his living water, his purity, his irresistible power. Faith means realizing that he is alive and that he loves us; he does not abandon us and, as a result, he is capable of intervening mysteriously in our history. He brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity (*ibid.*, 278).

In the desert, the people of Israel were tempted to seek other gods, to worship the golden calf, to trust in their own strength. But God always called them back to him, and they remembered what they heard and saw on the mountain. Like that people, we know we are a *chosen* people, a *priestly* people, a *holy* people (cf. *Ex* 19:6; *1 Pet* 2:9). It is the Spirit who reminds us of all these things (cf. *Jn* 14:26).

Being *chosen* does not mean being exclusive or sectarian. We are the small portion of yeast that must make the dough rise; we do not hide or withdraw, or consider ourselves better or purer. The eagle shelters her fledglings, carries them to the heights until they can fend for themselves. Then she has to force them to leave those comfort zones. She shakes their nest, pushes them into the open air where they have to spread their wings, and she flies beneath them to protect them, to keep them from hurting themselves. This is how God is with his chosen people; he wants them to “go forth” and fly boldly, knowing that they

are always protected by him alone. We have to leave our fears behind and go forth from our safe places, because today most Estonians do not identify themselves as believers.

So go out as *priests*, for that is what we are by baptism. Go out to build relationships with God, to facilitate them, to encourage a loving encounter with the one who cries out: “Come to me!” (*Mt 11:28*). We need to be seen as close to others, capable of contemplation, compassion and willingness to spend time with others, as often as necessary. This is the “art of accompaniment”. It is carried out with the healing rhythm of “closeness”, with a respectful and compassionate gaze capable of healing, liberating and encouraging growth in the Christian life (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169).

Bear witness as a *holy* people. We may be tempted to think that holiness is only for a few. However, “we are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14). But, just as the water in the desert was not a personal but a common good, just as the manna could not be stored because it spoiled, so a lived holiness expands, overflows and makes fruitful all that it touches. Today we choose to be saints by shoring up the outskirts and fringes of our society, wherever our brothers and sisters lie prostrate and experience rejection. We can’t think somebody else will be the one to stop and help, nor that these are problems to be resolved by institutions. It is up to us to fix our gaze on those brother and sister and to offer a helping hand, because they bear the image of God, they are our brothers and sisters, redeemed by Jesus Christ. This is what it is to be a Christian; this is holiness lived on a day-to-day basis (cf. *ibid.*, 98).

In your history you have shown your pride in being Estonians. You sing it saying: “I am Estonian, I will always be Estonian, it is good to be Estonian, we are Estonians”. How good it is to feel part of a people; how good it is to be independent and free. May we go to the holy mountain, to the mountain of Moses, to the mountain of Jesus. May we ask him - as the motto of this Visit says - to awaken our hearts and to grant us the gift of the Spirit. In this way, at every moment of history, may we

discern how to be free, how to embrace goodness and feel chosen, and how to let God increase, here in Estonia and in the whole world, his holy nation, his priestly people.

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PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM TALLIN (ESTONIA) TO ROME

Papal flight
Tuesday, 25 September 2018

Greg Burke:

Good evening, Holy Father. Thank you, first of all. Three countries in four days is not very easy, it is rather tiring.... It seemed almost like four countries in four days, because there was the surprise about China the first day, so we also did this: we have drawn closer to China. Let's try to stay on topic – we have said this many times – to speak about the trip. Certainly we will begin with the local journalists from each country, but let's try in the press conference to speak about the journey in the Baltic countries. I don't know if you would like to say something first....

Pope Francis:

First of all, I thank you for the work you have done, because for you too, three countries in four days is not easy. Above all, moving from place to another is tiring. I thank you very much for the service that you offer to the people on this journey, which is the most important aspect of your communication: what happened there.... There have been very interesting things on this trip, and I look forward to questions in this regard.

Greg Burke:

Thank you. The first is Saulena ; ŽIUGŽDAITE of *Bernardinai.LT* (Lithuania):

Saulena ŽIUGŽDAITE:

Holy Father, thank you for this moment and for this entire journey. When you spoke in Vilnius of the Lithuanian spirit, you said that we need to be a bridge between East and West. But it is not easy to be a bridge: you are always crossed by others. Some say that our tragedy is

that we are on the bridge. One might say: “It is decidedly better to become part of the East with its values”. What did you mean; what does it mean to be a bridge?

Pope Francis:

It is true.... It is obvious that today, politically, you are part of the East, of the European Union, and you have done a great deal to enter the European Union. After independence, you immediately complied with all the requirements, which are not easy, and you managed to enter the European Union, which is belonging to the East. You also have relations with NATO: you belong to NATO, and this means the East. If you look to the East there is your history: a difficult history. Even part of your tragic history came from the East, from the Germans, from the Poles, but above all from Nazism: this came from the East. And, regarding the East, from the Russian Empire.

Building bridges assumes, demands strength. Strength not only through membership in the East, which gives you strength, but through your own identity. I realize that the situation of the three Baltic countries is always in peril, always. Fear of invasion.... Because history itself reminds you of this. And you are right when you say it isn't easy, but this is a game that is played each day, one step after the other: with culture, with dialogue.... But it is not easy. I think it is the duty of all of us to help you with this. More than to help you, to be close to you, with the heart.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Holy Father. The next question comes from Gints AMOLINS, *Latvijas Radio* (Latvia)

Gints AMOLINS:

Good afternoon, your Holiness. In the Baltic countries, you often spoke about the importance of roots and of identity. From Latvia, and also from Lithuania and from Estonia, there are many people who have left for more prosperous countries and many are already putting roots down elsewhere. And then, there are also, as in Europe in general, demographic issues, due to low birth rates. So, in this situation what

can and should our countries do – the leaders of our countries and also each person individually? How should this issue be evaluated?

Pope Francis:

In my homeland, I did not know people from Estonia and Latvia, whereas Lithuanian immigration is very strong, in relative terms. In Argentina there are many of them. And they bring their culture there, their history, and they are proud of redoubling their efforts to insert themselves into the new country and also to preserve their identity. In their celebrations there are traditional clothes, traditional songs, and always, whenever they can, they return to visit their homeland.... I think that the struggle to maintain identity makes them very strong, and you have this: you have a strong identity. An identity that was formed in suffering, in defense and in work, in culture.

And what can be done to protect identity? Returning to your roots, this is important. Identity is something ancient, but it must be passed on. Identity is integral to the membership in a people, and membership in a people must be passed on. Roots must be passed on to the new generations, and this is done with education and dialogue, especially between the elderly and the young. And you have to do it, because it is a treasure of your identity. Every identity is a treasure, but conceived as membership in a people. This is what comes to mind, I don't know if it corresponds to your question....

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Holy Father. And now, Evelyn KALDOJA, *Postimees* (Estonia)

Evelyn KALDOJA:

Thank you. *I would like to ask the question in English. In today's homily, you said that there are some who shout and threaten to use weapons and to employ armies, and so on. Considering where we are, in that very square there were NATO troops sent to Estonia for security. Many thought about the situation on the eastern borders of Europe. Are you concerned about the tensions in that area and for the Catholics who live straddling European borders?*

Pope Francis:

The threat of arms. Today, global arms spending is scandalous. They tell me that, with what is spent on weapons in one month, all the world's hungry could probably be fed for a year. I do not know if it is true. It is terrible. The industry, the arms trade, even the smuggling of weapons is one of the greatest forms of corruption. And before this there is the logic of defense. David was able to win with a slingshot and five stones, but today there are no Davids. I think that to protect a country it takes a *reasonable*, and not *aggressive*, defensive army. Reasonable and not aggressive. This way defense is licit; and it is also an honour to defend one's homeland this way. The problem starts when it becomes aggressive, unreasonable and wars are waged. We have many examples of border wars, not only in Europe, toward the East, but also on other continents: they fight for power, to colonize a country. This is, in my opinion, the answer to your question. Today, the weapons industry is scandalous, before a hungry world. Second: it is licit, reasonable to have an army to protect borders because this is an honour, as it is licit to have the key to the door of the house. For protection.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Holy Father. The next question is from the German group: Stefanie STAHLHOFEN, *Catholic Information Centre – CIC*, Germany

Stefanie STAHLHOFEN:

Holy Father, in the ecumenical meeting in Tallinn you say that young people, in the face of the sex scandals, do not see a clear condemnation on the part of the Catholic Church. In Germany just today a new investigation came out regarding sexual abuse and how the Church has dealt with so many cases.

Pope Francis:

I will speak about this afterwards. First I will answer questions about the journey. Thank you. This is the rule. But the first question will be addressed after those about the trip.

Greg Burke:

Let's stick with the trip... Now a journalist from *Lithuanian Radio-Television*.

Edvardas SPOKAS

I will speak in English

In all three countries you said you were in favour of openness: openness regarding migrants, openness regarding the other. But, for example, in Lithuania there was a confrontation about the case of a girl whom you greeted upon your landing, in front of the plane: she did not have an expressly Lithuanian appearance. She was part Italian, with olive skin.... My question is: do people in the Baltic countries hear only what they want to hear from you, or do they hear what you are trying to tell them? Do they hear your message about openness?

Pope Francis:

The message about openness to migrants is rather advanced in your people; there are no blazing populists, no. In Estonia and Latvia too they are open people who want to integrate migrants, but not massively, because you cannot. Integrate them with governmental prudence. We spoke about this with two of the three heads of state, and they broached the subject, not I. And in the Presidents' addresses, you will see that the word "welcome", "openness" is frequent. This indicates a wish for universality, to the extent possible, for space, work, and so on; to the extent that you can integrate – this is very important – and to the extent that your own identity is not threatened. They are three things that I understand about the migration of people. And this really touched me: prudent and well thought-out openness. I do not know if you are thinking of something else.

Edvardas SPOKAS

My question is about how your message was received.

Pope Francis:

I think so. In this sense that I have mentioned. Because today, the

issue of migrants throughout the world – and not just external migration, but also within the continents – is a serious problem. It is not easy to study it. In every country, in every location, in every place it has different connotations.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Holy Father; we have finished with the questions about the journey.

Pope Francis:

Very well. I would like to tell you something about several points of the journey that I experienced with a special force.

The fact of your history, of the *history of the Baltic countries*: a history of invasions, of dictatorships, of crimes, of deportations.... When I visited the Museum in Vilnius: ‘museum’ is a word that makes me think of the Louvre.... No. That Museum is a prison. It is a prison to which inmates were taken, for political or religious reasons. And I saw cells the size of this seat, where you could only stare at your feet, torture chambers. I saw places for torture where, with the cold there is in Lithuania, they took the prisoners naked and threw water on them, and they stayed there for hours and hours, to break down their resistance. And then I entered the room, the great execution room. The prisoners were taken there by force and killed with a blow to the neck; then they were sent out on a conveyor belt and loaded onto a truck that tossed them into the forest. They killed more or less 40 of them a day. In the end there were about 15,000 of them killed there. This is part of Lithuania’s history, but also of the other countries. Then I went to the site of the Great Ghetto, where thousands of Jews were killed. Then, the same afternoon, I went to the Monument to the memory of those who were condemned, killed, tortured, deported. That day – I’ll tell you the truth – I was destroyed: it made me think about the cruelty. But I tell you that, based on the information we have today, the cruelty is not over. The same cruelty is found today in many detention sites; today it is found in many prisons; even the overpopulation of prison is a system of torture, a manner of living without dignity. Today, a prison that does

not plan to give the inmate a prospect of hope, is already torture. Then we have seen, on television, the cruelty of ISIS terrorists: that Jordanian pilot burned alive, those Coptic Christians whose throats were slit on the beach in Libya, and many others. Today the cruelty has not ended. It exists all over the world. And I would like to convey this message to you, as journalists: this is a scandal, a serious scandal of our culture and our society.

Another thing I saw in these three countries is [*the past regime's*] *hatred for religion*, whichever it may be. Hatred. I saw a Jesuit Bishop, in Lithuania or Latvia, I do not remember well, who had been deported to Siberia for 10 years, then to another concentration camp.... Now he is elderly, smiling.... So many men and women, for defending their faith, which was their identity, were tortured and deported to Siberia, and never returned; or they were killed. The faith of these three countries is great; it is a faith born precisely from martyrdom, and this is something you have seen, speaking with the people, as you journalists do, to have news about the country.

Moreover, this experience of such important faith produced a unique phenomenon in these countries: an *ecumenical life* like there is in no others, so generalized. There is true ecumenism: ecumenism among Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans and also Orthodox. In the cathedral yesterday, at the ecumenical meeting in Riga, Latvia, we saw it: a remarkable thing; brothers and sisters, neighbours, together in one church..., neighbours. Ecumenism has put its roots there.

Then, there is another phenomenon in these countries that is important to study, and perhaps you can do many good things in your profession, by studying this: the phenomenon of the *transmission of culture, of identity and of faith*. Ordinarily, the transmission has been by grandparents. Why? Because fathers worked, fathers and mothers had to work, and they had to be involved in the party – both in the Soviet and in the Nazi regimes – and also educated in atheism. But the grandparents were able to pass on the faith and the culture. At the time that in Lithuania the use of the Lithuanian language was forbidden, it was removed from the schools, when they went to the religious service

– whether Protestant or Catholic – they picked up the prayer books to see if they in Lithuanian or Russian or German. And many – a generation in that era – learned the mother tongue from their grandparents: it was the grandparents who taught how to write and read the mother tongue. This makes us think, and some article would be nice, some television service on the transmission of culture, of language, of art, of faith in times of dictatorship and persecution. One could not think otherwise, because all means of communication, which at that time were few – radio – were held by the state. When a government becomes, seeks to become dictatorial, the first thing it does is take the means of communication in hand.

I wanted to emphasize these things.

And now, I refer to today's meeting with young people. Young people are scandalized: here I will introduce the first question that had strayed from the topic of the trip. Young people are scandalized by the hypocrisy of older adults. They are scandalized by war; they are scandalized by contradiction; they are scandalized by corruption. And included in this corruption is what you highlighted, sexual abuse. It is true that there is an accusation against the Church, and we all know, we know the statistics, I will not state them here. But even had there been only a single priest who abused a boy or a girl, this would still be monstrous, because that man was chosen by God to lead that child to heaven. I understand that young people are scandalized about this, such large-scale corruption. They know that it is everywhere, but in the Church it is more scandalous, because we are supposed to lead the children to God, not destroy them. Young people try to make their way through experience. In the meeting with young people today it was very clear: they ask to be listened to; they ask for listening. They do not want fixed formulas. They do not want directorial support. And the second part of this question, which was the first one beyond the scope of the journey, was that "the Church is not doing what she should in this matter, in cleaning up this corruption". I'll take the Pennsylvania report, for example, and we see that until the early 1970s there were many priests who had fallen into this corruption. Then, in more recent times, they decreased because the Church realized that she had to

grapple in another way. In times past, these things were covered up. They were also covered up in the home, when an uncle molested a niece, when a father molested his children: it was covered up, because it was a terrible disgrace. It was the way they thought in previous centuries, and in the last century. In this there is a principle that really helps me to interpret history: a historical fact should be interpreted with the hermeneutic of the time in which this fact occurred, not with today's hermeneutic. For example: indigence. There have been many injustices, many atrocities. But they cannot be interpreted with a present day hermeneutic, when we have a different awareness. A final example: the death penalty. Even the Vatican, as a state, when it was a Pontifical state, had the death penalty; the last one, a criminal, a young man, was beheaded in around 1870. But then moral consciousness grew; the moral conscience grew.

It is true that there are always loopholes; there are always hidden death sentences: you are old, you are bothersome, I will not give you medicine ..., and then they say "he passed away". It is a modern social death sentence. But I think with this I have responded. The Church: I take the example of Pennsylvania, you see the proportions and you see when the Church began to take notice of this, she put everything there. And in recent times I have received many, many convictions issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and I have said: "Continue, continue". After a conviction I have never, never signed a request for clemency. This is not negotiable; there is no negotiation.

Greg Burke:

Antonio Pelayo, "*Vida nueva*" Antena 3 (Spain):

Antonio Pelayo:

Holy Father, three days ago an Agreement was signed between the Holy See and the government of the People's Republic of China. Can you give us some additional information about this, about its content? Because some Chinese Catholics, in particular Cardinal Zen, accuse you of selling out the Church to the Communist government of Beijing, after many years of suffering. How do you respond to this accusation?

Pope Francis:

This has been a years-long process, a dialogue between the Vatican Commission and the Chinese Commission, to find a solution concerning the appointment of bishops. The Vatican team worked very hard. I would like to mention a few names: Msgr Celli, who patiently went, dialogued, returned ... for years, years! Then, Msgr Rota Graziosi, a humble 72-year member of the Curia who wished to be a parish priest but remained in the Curia to help with this process. And then, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, who is a very devoted man, and has a particular attachment to the magnifying glass: he studies every document down to the period, comma, accent mark.... And this gives me a great deal of certitude. And this team, with these qualities, made progress. You know that when a peace agreement is sought or negotiation is undertaken, both sides lose something, this is the rule. Both sides. And progress is made. This process went like this: two steps forward, one back, two forward, one back...; then months passed without talking, and then.... They are God's times, which resemble Chinese time: slowly.... This is wisdom, the wisdom of the Chinese. The situations of the bishops who were in difficulty were studied on a case by case basis, and in the end the dossiers arrived on my desk, and I was the one responsible for signing, in the case of the bishops. As for the Agreement, the drafts came across my desk, they were discussed, I shared my ideas, the others debated and they went ahead. I think about the resistance, of the Catholics who have suffered: it is true, they will suffer. There is always suffering with an agreement. But they have great faith and they write, they send messages, affirming that what the Holy See says, what Peter says, is what Jesus says: that is, the "martyrial" faith of these people moves forward today. They are great. And the Agreement that I signed, the Letters Plenipotentiary for the signing of that Agreement. I am responsible. The others, whom I appointed, have worked for over 10 years. It is not an improvisation: it is a journey, a true journey.

And then, a simple anecdote and a historical fact, two things before ending. When that famous communique' was released by a former Apostolic Nuncio, the episcopates of the world wrote to me, saying that

they felt close, that they were praying for me; Chinese faithful also wrote, and the signature on this text was that of the bishop – so to speak – of the traditional Chinese Catholic Church and of the Patriotic Church: together, both of them, and the faithful of both Churches. For me, this was a sign of God. And the second thing: we forget that in Latin America – thank God this has been overcome! – we forget that for 350 years it was the kings of Portugal and Spain who nominated bishops. And the Pope gave only jurisdiction. We forget the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: Maria Teresa got tired of signing bishops' appointments, and gave the jurisdiction to the Vatican. Other eras, thank God, that are not repeated! But the current case is not for the appointment: it is a dialogue about potential candidates. The matter is carried out through dialogue. But the appointment is by Rome; the appointment is by the Pope. This is clear. And we pray for the suffering of some who do not understand or who have many years of clandestine existence behind them.

I thank you very much! They tell us that dinner is ready and the flight is not long. Thank you very much! Thank you very much for your work. And pray for me.

Greg Burke:

Thank you, Holy Father. Enjoy your dinner and rest well.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

A REVIEW OF THE PAPAL TRIP TO BALTIC COUNTRIES

St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 26 September 2018

*My mission was to proclaim anew to those peoples
the joy of the Gospel and the revolution of tenderness, of mercy*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

In the past days, I have just completed an Apostolic Journey to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, on the occasion of the centenary of the independence of these Baltic countries. One hundred years, half of which they lived under the yoke of Occupations, first the Nazi and then the Soviet. They are people that have suffered much and, because of this, the Lord has looked at them with predilection. I'm certain of this. I thank the Presidents of the three Republics and the civil Authorities for the exquisite reception I received. I thank the Bishops and all those that collaborated to prepare and carry out this ecclesial event.

My visit happened in a rather changed context from that which St. John Paul II found. My mission was to proclaim anew the joy of the Gospel and the revolution of tenderness, of mercy, because freedom isn't enough to give meaning and fullness of life, without love, the love that always comes from God. The Gospel, which in the time of trial gives strength and encourages the struggle for liberation, in the time of freedom is light for the daily journey of people, of families, of the society, and salt that gives flavour to ordinary life and preserves it from the corruption of mediocrity and egoisms.

In Lithuania, Catholics are the majority, whereas in Latvia and Estonia Lutherans and Orthodox prevail; however, many have distanced themselves from religious life. Therefore, the challenge is that

of reinforcing communion among all Christians, already developed during the harsh period of persecution. In fact, the ecumenical dimension was intrinsic to this trip, and found expression in the

moment of prayer at the Cathedral of Riga and in the meeting with young people in Tallinn.

In addressing the respective Authorities of the three countries, I stressed the contribution they make to the community of Nations and, especially, to Europe: contribution of human and social values, which passed through the crucible of trial. I encouraged dialogue between the generation of the elderly and that of young people, so that contact with the “roots” can continue to fertilize the present and the future. I exhorted to always combine freedom with solidarity and hospitality, according to the traditions of those lands.

Two specific meetings were dedicated to young people and the elderly: in Vilnius with young people, in Riga with the elderly. Palpable in the Square in Vilnius, full of boys and girls, was the motto of the visit in Lithuania: “Jesus Christ Our Hope.” The testimonies expressed the beauty of prayer and singing, where the soul opens to God, the joy of serving others, coming out of the enclosure of the “I” to be on the way, able to rise after falls. In Latvia with the elderly I stressed the close bond between patience and hope. Those that have gone through harsh trials are the roots of a people, to protect with God’s grace, so that the new shoots can draw from them and flower and bear fruit. The challenge for those growing old is not to harden inside, but to remain open and tender in mind and heart, and this is possible with the “lymph” of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and in listening of the Word.

Also with the priests, the consecrated and seminarians in Lithuania, the dimension of constancy seemed essential for hope: to be centred on God, firmly rooted in His love. What great witness of this so many elderly priests, men and women religious have given and still give! They suffered slander, imprisonment, deportation . . . , but they remained firm in the faith. I exhorted not to forget and to guard the memory of the martyrs, to follow their example.

And, in connection with memory, in Vilnius I paid homage to the victims of the Jewish genocide in Lithuania, exactly 75 years since the closure of the Ghetto, which was the anti-chamber of death for tens of thousands of Jews. At the same time I visited the Museum of the Occupations and the Struggles for Freedom: In fact, I paused in prayer in the rooms where the opponents of the regime were detained, tortured and killed. They killed more or less forty a night. It's overwhelming to see to what point human cruelty can reach. Let us think of this.

The years pass, regimes pass, but above the Gate of Dawn of Vilnius, Mary, Mother of Mercy, continues to watch over her people, as sign of sure hope and consolation (cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 68).

Concrete charity is always a living sign of the Gospel. Even where secularization is strongest, God speaks with the language of love, of healing, of free service for those in need. And then hearts open, and miracles happen: new life springs in the deserts.

In the three Eucharistic celebrations — at Kaunas, Lithuania; at Aglona, Latvia and at Tallinn, Estonia — the holy faithful People of God journeying in those lands renewed their “yes” to Christ, our hope. They renewed it with Mary, who always shows herself Mother of her children, especially those suffering most; they renewed it as chosen, priestly and holy people in whose heart God reawakens the grace of Baptism. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters of Lithuania, of Latvia and of Estonia. Thank you!

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