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THE POPE RETURNS TO THE VATICAN AND SPEAKS TO JOURNALISTS ON THE FLIGHT

Vatican City, 27 May 2014 (VIS) – At the end of his trip, during the flight from Tel Aviv to Rome, Pope Francis spoke for over 40 minutes with the journalists who accompanied him on the flight, answering their questions on various issues linked not only to his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but also in relation to the abuse of minors, remarried divorcees, his upcoming trips, priestly celibacy, and so on. Below is a summary of some of the Pope's answers.

The Holy Land and the prayer meeting in the Vatican with Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas.

The most authentic gestures are those that we don't think about, those that come to us, aren't they? I thought about suggesting it during the trip, but there were many logistical problems, because each one has to consider the territory, and it's not easy. So I thought about a meeting, and at the end, I came up with this invitation. It will be an encounter to pray, not for the purposes of mediation. We will pray with the two presidents; prayer is important, it helps. Afterwards, each person will return home. There would be a rabbi, a Muslim, and myself.

Abuse of minors

At the moment there are three bishops under investigations: one has already been found guilty and we are now considering the penalty to be imposed. There are no privileges. ... A priest who does this betrays the Body of the Lord, because this priest must lead this child, this boy, this girl, to sanctity, and this boy or girl trusts in him; and instead of leading them to sanctity he abuses them. This is very serious. It is like, by way of comparison, holding a black Mass. You are supposed to lead them to sanctity and instead you lead them to a problem that will last their entire lives. In a few days' time there will be a Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae with some survivors of abuse, and then a meeting with them. ... But we must move forward on this issue, with zero tolerance!

Stable and lasting peace in Jerusalem

The Catholic Church has established its position from a religious point of view: it will be the city of peace for the three religions. The concrete measures for peace must come from negotiations. I agree that from the negotiations perhaps it will emerge that it will be the capital of one State or another, it would be madness on my part. But these are hypotheses, and I do not consider myself competent to say that we should do one thing or another. I believe that it is necessary to negotiate with honesty, fraternity and great trust in the path of negotiation. It takes courage to do this, and I pray that these two leaders, these two governments will have the courage to take this path. It is the only route to peace.

Priestly celibacy

The Catholic Church has married priests – Greek Catholics, Coptic Catholics, those of oriental rites. Celibacy is not a question of dogma, but rather a rule of life that I greatly appreciate, as I believe it is a gift for the Church. But, since it is not a dogma of faith, the door is always open.

Relations with the Orthodox Churches

Patriarch Bartholomew and I spoke about the unity we create as we walk together. Unity cannot be created in a congress on theology. He confirmed that Athenagoras said to Paul VI: "We go ahead together, calmly, and put all the theologians together on an island where they can discuss among themselves, and we walk ahead in life!". There are many things we can do to help each other. For instance, with the Churches. In Rome, as in many cities, many Orthodox go to Catholic churches. Another thing we mentioned, that may be considered in the pan-orthodox Council, is the date of Easter, because it is somewhat ridiculous to say, "When is your Christ resurrected? Mine was resurrected last week". Yes, the date of Easter is a sign of unity. ... We also spoke a lot on the problems of ecology, and the need to work together on this issue.

Forthcoming trips and the problems faced by Christians in Asia

With regard to Asia, two trips are planned: the one to South Korea, for the meeting of young Asians, and then, next January, a two-day trip to Sri Lanka and then on to the Philippines, to the area affected by the typhoon. The problem of the lack of freedom of worship affects not only certain Asian countries, but also other countries in the world. Religious freedom is something that not all countries have. Some have a certain level of control ... others adopt measures that lead to a real persecution of believers. There are martyrs! There are martyrs in our times, Christian martyrs, both Catholic and non-Catholic. There are places where it is forbidden to wear a crucifix or to possess a Bible; where it is forbidden to teach the catechism to children.

Abdication from the pontificate in the case of failing strength and the issue of Popes emeritus

I will do what the Lord tells me to do: pray, and seek God's will. But I think that Benedict XVI is not a unique case. It happened because he no longer had the strength and in an honest way – he is a man of faith, and humble – he took this decision. Seventy years ago bishops emeritus barely existed, whereas now there are many. What will happen to Popes emeritus? I think that we must look to him as an institution. He has opened a door, the door of Popes emeritus. Will there

be others? Only God knows. But this door is open, and I think that a bishop of Rome, a Pope who feels that his strength is declining – because we live much longer now – must ask himself the same questions that Pope Benedict faced.

Beatification of Pius XII

The cause for Pius XII is open. However, there has been no miracle, and if there are no miracles it is not yet possible to go ahead.

Synod on the family and remarried divorcees

The Synod in October will be on the family and the problems it faces; its riches and its current situation. I do not like the fact that many people, even within the Church, have said that it will be the Synod about remarried divorcees, as if it could simply be reduced to a case study: can they receive communion or not? The issue is much broader. Today, as we all know, the family is in crisis, and it is a global crisis. Young people no longer want to get married, or prefer simply to live together; marriage is in crisis, and therefore the family is too. The problem of family pastoral care is very broad. Pope Benedict said something about the family three times: it is necessary to study the faith with which a person approaches marriage and clarify that divorcees are not excommunicated, and very often they are treated as if they are.

Reform of the Roman Curia

The council of eight cardinals is studying the constitution “Pastor bonus” and the Roman Curia. It has consulted many people and with the Curia and is still studying certain issues, such as bringing together various dicasteries to streamline organisation. One of the key points is the economy, and it is therefore necessary to work in collaboration with the secretary of State. ... The obstacles are those one encounters in any process of this type. Planning the approach, the work of persuasion is very important. There are some people who do not see this clearly, but any reform involves these things. But I am content, in truth.

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