



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO TIRANA (ALBANIA)

IN-FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FROM ALBANIA TO ROME

Papal Flight
Sunday, 21 September 2014

Fr. Lombardi:

We are very grateful to the Holy Father for being with us, especially at the end of so busy a day. He wanted to be available to us for a few questions about the trip. So we chose to have the questions asked by our three Albanian colleagues, who have been with us for the entire trip. They travelled to Rome to make this journey with you, and now they are returning once more to Rome to conclude the experience. They are from three Albanian television stations. We begin with Mrs. Mira Tuci, from Albanian national television.

Journalist:

Your Holiness set out with a certain idea of Albanians, of Albania. How Albanians have suffered but are also tolerant. Did you find any other qualities in the Albanians which you met? Are these qualities the right ones to make the eagle return to the nest?

Pope Francis:

I would say that I came to a better understanding of those things you mentioned, but I was also able to see at close hand the suffering which you Albanians endured. The matter of tolerance... I would put it differently. Albanians are not so much “tolerant” – they are brothers and sisters. They have the ability to be brothers and sisters: and that is something more important. And this is

evident in the way they live with one another, in the cooperation between Muslims, Orthodox and Catholics. They cooperate, but as brothers and sisters, no? Another thing which struck me from the beginning is how young the country is. After I noted this, I was told that it is the youngest country of Europe. But Albania has, it is clear, a superior development in culture and also in governance, thanks to this brotherhood.

Journalist:

Your Holiness, what were your emotions as you drove down the central boulevard of Tirana, under the pictures of the clergy who were martyred during the communist regime, in a country in which until twenty-five years ago atheism had been officially imposed?

Pope Francis:

For two months I have been working to understand that difficult period in Albania; I tried to understand how it began. But from the beginning you [also] have beautiful, strong cultural roots, a great culture. I tried to understand this and it was a cruel period; the level of cruelty was horrible. When I saw those photographs (and there were not only Catholics, but Orthodox also Muslims as well...) and I thought of how they were told that they could not believe in God... [and when they said:] "I do believe in God", they were immediately executed. So I would say that all three religious groups bore witness to God and now they are bearing witness to brotherhood.

Journalist:

Your Holiness, you visited Albania, which is a country with a Muslim majority. But your visit took place at a very uncertain time in our world. You yourself have said that the third world war has already begun. Is the message of your visit for Albanians alone, or for others too?

Pope Francis:

No, it is for others too. It is broader. Albania has taken the route of peace, coexistence and cooperation, which extends to other countries which also have various ethnic roots. You said that it is a country with a Muslim majority. True, but it is not a Muslim country; it is a European country. This was a surprise to me. Albania is a European country precisely because of its culture – the culture of coexistence, also its past culture.

Journalist:

Now that you have made this visit to Albania, which is in Europe, what will be your next ones?

Pope Francis:

I can't alter the geography. The next visits will be on 25 November to Strasbourg, for both the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. And then 28 November, perhaps, to Turkey, to be present on the 30th for the Feast of Saint Andrew with Patriarch Bartholomaios.

Journalist:

Your Holiness, we have come to see that you have a vision of Albania somewhat different than that of Europeans. In other words, we see Europe pretty much as the European Union. You chose as the first European country which you visited a country on the periphery, one which is not a member of the European Union. What might this say to those who only see the Europe of the "powerful"?

Pope Francis:

That this trip of mine is a message, it is a sign: it is a sign which I wish to give.

Journalist:

I think that all of us saw you weep for the first time; you were greatly moved by that encounter [with the living martyrs]. It was, I believe, the most moving moment of the visit.

Pope Francis:

To listen to a martyr speak about his own martyrdom is powerful! I believe that all of us present were moved: all of us. Those witnesses spoke as if they were talking about someone else, so naturally and so humbly. It did me good!

Thank you very much, and enjoy your dinner.