APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PANAMA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 34th WORLD YOUTH DAY***PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT FROM PANAMA TO ROME****Papal flight*
*Sunday, 27 January 2019***[Multimedia]**

Gisotti:

Good evening!

Holy Father, we still have in our ears the cry, “The youth of the Pope”, “the youth of Jesus Christ”, as Archbishop Ulloa [of Panama] said. This great and intense joy of these days has given so much energy. And I believe we have all seen in your face the joy of this meeting, just like in the faces of the young people. I have brought something here which many of the journalists, I think almost all, know: this will not be a document which enters into the Magisterium of the Pope; but it is a document to which I know you attach much importance. This is a song which a girl from Honduras, Martha Avila, wrote, and yesterday I presented you with the picture. This song is essentially a song against bullying, and it was, in a way, a sign of the meeting with the *Scholas Occurrentes*. This tells us how the element of sadness is present among these young people, together with the joy we have seen on so many occasions. I want to mention just one image that struck me deeply: Holy Father, when you passed by in the Popemobile, I saw so many young people who, after having greeted you, maybe only for an instant, hugged each other. This touched me: the sharing of joy, that is, the young people who hugged each other after having seen you only for an instant. This is perhaps something that is a lesson for us adults. Young people, when they are happy, share their joy, they don’t keep it for themselves. This is something which I wanted to share with you and the journalists.

Holy Father, you have also had – among the many surprises of these days – a meeting with UNICEF, just in the last moments before departure, in the Nunciature.

I don’t know if you want to say some words of greeting before I give the floor to the journalists with their questions…

Pope Francis:

Good evening, and then have a good rest, because you must all be tired after this very intense journey. Thank you for your work! For me too, there have been things that I had not imagined, surprises, such as the one Gisotti spoke of, about the sixteen-year-old girl from Honduras, a victim of bullying, who sang with a beautiful voice and she wrote this song herself. And also the meeting, before leaving the Nunciature, with UNICEF of Central America, with several testimonies from two young people, and then those who work: I heard things that touch the heart. It was an intense journey. Now over to you.

Gisotti:

A journey that has so many journeys within it; I ask you, therefore, to stick to the theme of this great visit which represented the world through the young people who were present. Obviously, the first word goes to the local press of Panama: Edwin Cabrera Uribe of Radiopanamá. He will ask you two questions in the name of all the Panamanian journalists. Thank you, Edwin.

Edwin Cabrera Uribe (in Spanish):

Holy Father, first of all many thanks, on behalf of my six colleagues and myself, as Panamanians. What you have given us is great, really great. The question: Holy Father, today you spoke to the volunteers, telling them that they have experienced a mission, a mission. You said to them: 'Now you know how the heart beats when you experience a mission'. The question is: what was Pope Francis's mission in Panama? What struck you? What moved you? Did Pope Francis fulfil his mission to the Central American WYD? Because it took place in Panama, although in Poland it was announced that it would be in Central America. And on the way, we have a mission pending with Nicaragua, is this not so?

Pope Francis (in Spanish):

My mission for a World Youth Day is the mission of Peter, to confirm in faith, and not with cold indications or precepts, but by allowing my heart to be touched and by responding to what was taking place there. I do not understand – because I live it in my heart – I do not understand and I find it hard to imagine that one could fulfil a mission using only one's head. To fulfil a mission one needs to feel, and when you feel you are struck. Life strikes you; problems strike you... At the airport I was saying goodbye to the President when they brought a little African boy, pleasant, very dark skinned, this tall. And he said to me: "Look, this little boy was crossing the Colombian border; his mother died and he was left alone. He must be about five years old. He came from Africa but we still do not know from which country because he does not speak English, nor Portuguese, nor French. He speaks only the language of his tribe. We have sort of adopted him". A smart child who moved about well... But the tragedy of a child abandoned by life, because his mother died and a

police officer entrusted him to the authorities so they could assume responsibility for him. This really affects you and helps the mission to take shape, it enables you to say something, or offer a caress. It is not something merely rational. Mission, in other words, always engages you. At least it does for me, maybe because I am “Italo” and it comes to me from within and engages me. I always tell young people: what you do in life you must do while walking, and with three languages: that of the head, that of the heart, that of the hands. And with the three languages in harmony, so that you think what you feel and what you do, feel what you think and what you do, do what you feel and what you think. I do not know how to provide an inventory of mission. All this I always take to prayer and I remain before the Lord, at times I fall asleep before the Lord, but bringing all these things that I have experienced during the mission and I ask him to confirm them in faith through me. This is what I mean by the Pope’s mission and how I experience it myself. There have been cases, for example, in which some difficulty of a dogmatic kind was raised, and I do not feel like responding only with reason, but it comes to me spontaneously to act in another way.

Edwin Cabrera Uribe (in Spanish):

In general, did WYD in Panama meet your expectations?

Pope Francis (in Spanish):

Clearly, the yardstick to see whether a journey has met expectations is exhaustion, and I am exhausted!

Edwin Cabrera Uribe (in Spanish):

And lastly, Holy Father, a common problem throughout Central America, including Panama and a large part of Latin America: pregnancy among girls, young women, teen pregnancy. There were 10,000 last year in Panama alone, and it was no different in Central America. Detractors of the Catholic Church blame the Church because she is opposed to sex education in schools. The Catholic Church runs many schools and universities in Latin America. I would like to know Pope Francis’ opinion on the topic of sex education.

Pope Francis (in Spanish):

I think it is important to teach sex education in schools. Sex is a gift from God. It is not for show; it is a gift from God in order to love. That someone would use it to make money, to exploit others, is a different problem. Objective sex education should be offered, as is, without ideological colonization. Because if sex education steeped in ideological colonization is taught in schools, it destroys the person. Sex as a gift from God must be taught, not with strictness; to educate comes from ‘*e-ducere*’, to draw the best from the person and accompany him or her along the journey. The problem lies with those responsible for education, both at the national and the local level and

in every individual school: the teachers chosen for this task, the books chosen, and so on... I have seen a “mixed bag” in this regard. There are some things that help mature and others that do damage. I think that this... I do not know whether it is objective or not, that there is no sex education in Panama, and I say this without getting into the political issues in Panama. There needs to be sex education for children. Ideally it begins in the home, with the parents. It is not always possible, for many family situations, or because they do not know how to do it. School makes up for this, and must do so. Otherwise a vacuum remains, which gets filled with any kind of ideology.

Gisotti:

Holy Father, now Javier Brocal, of Romereports, will ask a question.

Javier Martínez-Brocal [Spanish… continues in Italian]:

Holy Father, in the meantime I would like to congratulate you because you have broken the record, for in four days you have become a Panamanian – it took only four days to win the heart of Panama. I would like to ask you a question. I will do so in Italian, because from now on the answers will be in Italian. In these days, you have spoken with many people, with many young people; certainly you also spoke with young people who have distanced themselves from the Church or who encounter difficulty. In your opinion, what is the difficulty that young people face; what are the reasons that distance them from the Church? Thank you.

Pope Francis:

There are many. Some are personal, but more generally I think that the first is the lack of witness from Christians, priests, bishops. I do not say Popes, because that’s too much [laughter], but also them. The lack of witness. If a pastor is an entrepreneur or the organizer of a pastoral plan, if a pastor is not close to the people, this pastor does not offer the witness of a pastor; a pastor must be with the people; shepherd and flock, let us speak in these terms. A pastor must stand before the flock to point the way; among the flock to smell the odour of the people and to understand what the people perceive, what they need, how they feel; and behind the flock in order to look after the rear-guard. But if a pastor does not live with passion, the people feel abandoned or feel a certain sensation of disregard, they feel orphaned, and where there are orphans... I emphasized pastors, but also Christians, Catholic hypocrites, who go to Mass every Sunday and then do not pay bonuses, or pay under the table, exploit people and then go to the Caribbean, not only ‘on paper’ [for business purposes], but for a holiday, by exploiting people... ‘No, I am Catholic; I go every Sunday to Mass’. Yet if you do this [act hypocritically], you are giving a counter-witness and this, in my opinion, is what most distances people from the Church. Lay people too, everyone... I would say: do not say that you are Catholic if you do not bear witness. Say instead: I have a Catholic education but I am lukewarm; I am worldly; I apologize, do not look at me as a model.

This must be said. I am afraid of Catholics who think they are perfect. But history repeats itself: the same thing happened to Jesus with the doctors of the Law. ‘I thank you, Lord, that I am not like this poor sinner’. This is not right. This is what a lack of witness means. There are other reasons, personal problems, at times. But this is the most general one.

Gisotti:

Holy Father, now over to Caroline Pigozzi of “Paris Match”.

Pope Francis:

First of all I would like to thank you. I tracked down Fr Benoist de Sinety; he concelebrated with me... he is a good man... and also the two hundred young people from Paris.

Caroline Pigozzi:

He is very happy; and has another letter for you, your Holiness, which I will give you next week, because he has to write it...

Pope Francis:

Very good. Thank you for giving me that book [Benoist de Sinety, *Il faut que des voix s’élèvent. Accueil des migrants, un appel au courage,*Paris 2018].

Caroline Pigozzi:

At any rate, Holy Father, for four days we have seen these young people pray with great intensity. One can imagine that among all these young people some wish to enter religious life; one can also imagine that a certain number have a vocation. Perhaps someone is hesitant, thinking that it is a difficult journey without being able to marry. Is it possible to think that in the Catholic Church, following the Eastern Rite, you will permit married men to become priests?

Pope Francis:

In the Catholic Church, in the Eastern Rite they may do so, and the choice is made, celibate or spouse, before the diaconate.

Caroline Pigozzi:

But now, with the Catholic Church of the Latin Rite, can one think that you will see to make that decision?

Pope Francis:

Of the Latin rite... I am reminded of that phrase of Saint Paul VI: “I would rather give my life than change the law on celibacy”. It came to mind and I want to say it, because it is a courageous phrase, in a more difficult moment than this, 1968 / 1970... Personally, I think that celibacy is a gift for the Church. Second, I don’t agree with allowing optional celibacy, no. There might only remain a few possibilities in the most remote places – I am thinking of the Pacific islands... But it is one thing to reflect on when there is pastoral necessity, there, the pastor must think of the faithful. There is a book by Father Lobinger [Bishop Fritz Lobinger, *Preti per domani* (Priests for Tomorrow), Emi, 2009], it is interesting – this is a matter of discussion among theologians, there’s no decision on my part. My decision is: optional celibacy before the diaconate, no. That’s something for me, something personal, I won’t do it, this remains clear. Am I “closed”? Maybe. But I don’t want to appear before God with this decision. Returning to Father Lobinger: he said, “The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church”. But where there is no Eucharist, in the communities – you may think, Caroline, of the Pacific Islands...

Carolina Pigozzi:

... in the Amazon, also ...

Pope Francis:

... maybe there... in many places... Lobinger says: who makes the Eucharist? In those communities the “directors”, let’s say, the organizers of those communities are deacons or nuns or lay people, directly. And Lobinger says: one can ordain an elderly man, married – that is his thesis – one could ordain an elderly married man, but only so that he exercises the *munus sanctificandi*, that is, that he celebrates Mass, that he administers the sacrament of Reconciliation and performs the Anointing of the Sick. Priestly ordination gives the three *munera*: *regendi* – to govern, the pastor – ; *docendi* – to teach – and *sanctificandi*. This comes with ordination. The bishop would only give the faculties for the *munus sanctificandi*: this is the thesis. The book is interesting. Perhaps this can help in considering the problem. I believe that the problem must be opened in this sense, where there is a pastoral problem, because of the lack of priests. I’m not saying that it should be done, because I have not reflected, I have not prayed sufficiently about it. But the theologians must study [it]. An example is Father Lobinger... he was a *fidei donum* [priest], in South Africa... he is now an elderly man. I give this example to mean the points that they [the theologians] must study. I was talking to an official of the Secretariat of State, a bishop, who had to work in a communist country at the beginning of the revolution; when they saw how that revolution was going – in the 1950’s, more or less, – the bishops secretly ordained good, religious farm workers. Then, following the crisis, thirty years later, the matter was resolved. And he told me of the emotion he had felt when, in a concelebration, he saw these workers, with the hands of farmers, putting on their albs to concelebrate with the bishops. In the history of the Church, this

has happened. It is something to study, to think, and to pray about.

Caroline Pigozzi:

... there are those Protestants who have become Catholics...

Pope Francis:

Yes, you ask me about what Pope Benedict had done, it's true. I had forgotten this: "*Anglicanorum coetibus*", the Anglican priests who have become Catholics and keep their [married] lives, as if they were of the Eastern [rite]. At a Wednesday audience, I remember seeing many of them, with their collar, and many women with them and children holding the hands of the priests..., and they explained to me what it was. It is true: thank you for reminding me.

Gisotti:

Lena Klimkeit of Dpa will now ask a question

Lena Klimkeit:

Holy Father, during the Way of the Cross, on Friday, a young man said some very strong words about abortion; I want to repeat them for a moment: "There is a tomb that cries out to heaven and denounces the terrible cruelty of humanity, it is the tomb that opens in the wombs of mothers from whom an innocent life is torn. May God allow us to truly humanize ourselves, to firmly defend life and ensure that the laws that kill innocent life are erased forever". This is a very radical position, in my opinion. I wonder, and I would like to ask you, if this position also respects the suffering of women in this situation and if it corresponds to your message of mercy.

Pope Francis:

The message of mercy is for everyone, even for the developing human person. It is for everyone. After this failure, there is mercy as well, but a difficult mercy, because the problem is not in giving forgiveness, the problem is in accompanying a woman who has come to the realization she has had an abortion. These are terrible tragedies. Once I heard a doctor talking about a theory according to which – I don't remember well... a cell of the newly conceived fetus goes to the marrow of the mother and there is also a physical memory there. This is a theory, but it means: a woman when she thinks about what she did.... I tell you the truth: you have to be in the confessional, and you have to give comfort there, not punish anything. That is why, out of mercy, I have granted the faculty to absolve [from the sin of] abortion, because many times – indeed always – they have to meet with their child. And many times, when they cry and have this anguish, I counsel them: "Your child is in heaven, talk to him, sing him the lullaby that you did not sing, that

you could not sing to him". And there is found a way of reconciliation for the mother with her child. With God it's already there: it's God's forgiveness. God always forgives. But mercy also means that she [the woman] should work this through. The tragedy of abortion. To understand it well, one must be in a confessional. It is terrible.

Gisotti:

Thank you Holy Father. The next question is from Valentina Alazraki of Televisa. If I remember correctly, it's almost the 150th Apostolic journey...

Valentina Alazraki (in Spanish):

Pope Francis, you said here in Panama that you are very close to Venezuelans and you called for a just, peaceful solution, respecting the human rights of all. Venezuelans want to understand this better; they are waiting for your words, they want to know if the solution can be found through the recognition of Juan Guaidó, who has been supported by many countries? Others are calling for free elections in the short term. People feel you are a Latin American Pope, and they want your support, your help and your advice. Thank you.

Pope Francis:

At this time, I support all the people of Venezuela because it is a people that is suffering, those who are on one side and those who are on the other, yet all the people suffer. If I were to say: "listen to these countries, listen to these others that are saying this...", I would be taking on a role that I do not know. It would be a pastoral imprudence on my part and I would be causing damage. I have thought and rethought about the words [those uttered today]. And I believe that with them, I expressed my closeness and what I feel. I suffer for what is happening in Venezuela at this time and this is why I asked that they should come to an agreement… a just and peaceful solution. What scares me is bloodshed. And I also ask for great generosity on the part of those who can help, to resolve the problem. The problem of violence terrorizes me… After all the efforts that were made in Colombia, think about what happened at the police academy the other day, a horrifying thing. Blood is not a solution. This is why I have to be… I do not like the word, "balanced". I have to be a shepherd to everyone. And if there is need for help, they should ask for it in mutual agreement. This is the path. Thank you.

Gisotti:

Thank you, Holy Father. Now it's the turn of Junno Arocho Esteves of Catholic News Service.

Junno Arocho Esteves:

Good evening [Your] Holiness. During your lunch with a group of young pilgrims, a young American woman told us that she had asked you about the pain and the anger of many Catholics, particularly in the United States, over the abuse crisis. Many American Catholics pray for the Church, but many feel betrayed and battered after recent news of abuses and cover ups by some bishops, and have lost their trust in them. Holiness, what are your expectations or hopes for the meeting in February, so that the Church can begin again to rebuild trust between the faithful and their bishops?

Pope Francis:

This one is clever! He began from the trip and he went there… Well done! Thank you for the question. The idea was conceived in the C9 [Council of Cardinals] because there we saw that some bishops did not understand well or did not know what to do, or they did one good thing or one wrong thing. And we felt the responsibility of offering a "catechesis" to the episcopal conferences concerning this problem. This is why we are convening the presidents [to the February meeting]. A catechesis so that first, there be a greater awareness of this tragedy: what it means to be an abused boy or an abused girl. I regularly meet with abused people. I remember one: forty years without being able to pray. It is terrible, the suffering, it is terrible. Therefore, first: that they realize this. Second: that they know what should be done, the procedures. Because sometimes the bishop does not know what to do because it is something that has become very strong and [the knowledge of what to do] did not reach everywhere, let's put it this way. And then, that programmes should be created, general ones, but that they reach all the episcopal conferences; what the bishop should do, what the archbishop who is a metropolitan should do, what the president of the episcopal conference should do. But this must be clear – let's say it in somewhat juridical terms – protocols must be clear. This is the main thing. But before the things that have to be done, there is what I said earlier about becoming more aware. Then [in the February meeting] we will pray, there will be some testimonials to help in raising awareness, and then some penitential liturgies to ask for forgiveness for the entire Church. They are working well towards preparations for this. Allow me to say that I sensed a somewhat inflated expectation: we must lower expectations to these points that I have mentioned. Because the problem of abuses will continue. It is a human problem, but human everywhere! I read a statistic the other day, one of those statistics which say: fifty percent are reported, of this fifty, twenty percent are heard – and it decreases – and it ended like this: five percent are sentenced. It is terrible, terrible. It is a human tragedy of which we must become more aware. And by resolving the problem in the Church, by becoming more aware, we will also help to resolve it in society and in families where shame leads to cover-ups. But first we have to become aware, have the protocols in place, and move forward. This is it. And… well done!

Gisotti:

I don't know if there is time for another question… Maybe a brief one: Manuela Tulli of Ansa. If you

can be quick because – right now – they are about to serve dinner. Thanks, Manuela.

Manuela Tulli:

Good evening Holy Father. During this WYD, you said that it is absurd and irresponsible to consider migrants as bearers of social evils. In Italy, new policies on migrants have caused the closing of CARA of Castelnuovo di Porto, which you know well. It was an experience where one could see seeds of integration, the children went to school, and now – those people – are at risk of being uprooted. You chose to celebrate Holy Thursday with them in 2016. I would like to ask you something regarding this decision to close CARA of Castelnuovo di Porto where you celebrated Holy Thursday in 2016. And now the risk is a dispersion of that experience, with the children who…

Pope Francis:

Yes I heard about what was happening in Italy, but I was immersed in this [trip], therefore, I do not have precise knowledge about it, but I can imagine. It is true that the problem of migrants is a highly complex problem, highly complex. It is a problem that requires memory, that is, asking oneself if my country is made up of migrants. We Argentinians: all migrants. The United States: all migrants. This memory. A bishop, a cardinal – I do not remember who – wrote a beautiful article on the problem of "lack of memory", that is what it was called. This is one point. Then, the words that I use: to welcome, the heart open to receive; to accompany; to promote and to integrate. And I also say: those who govern should use prudence because prudence is the virtue of those who govern. I said this here, on the last flight, these words. Yes, it is a difficult equation. The example of Sweden comes to mind, which in the 1970's with the dictatorships – the *Operation Condor* in Latin America – had received many migrants, many, many, but all integrated. I also see what Sant'Egidio does for example: it integrates immediately. But last year, the Swedish said: 'Stop for a while because we are not able to complete the process'. And this is the prudence of those who govern. And it is a problem of charity, of love, of solidarity and I say again that the nations that were more generous in this, in welcoming – they were not as successful under other aspects – were Italy and Greece. Also Turkey, somewhat. But Greece was very generous. And Italy, very much so. And when I went to Lampedusa, it was at the beginning, in 2013. But it is true that one has to think realistically. Then there is another thing which it is important to take into account: a way of resolving the problem of migrations is to help the countries from where they come. Migrants come because of hunger or war. Investing where there is famine, Europe is capable of doing this, in order to favour growth. But there is always – speaking of Africa – there is always the collective imagination which we have in our subconscious: Africa should be exploited. This is historical and it is painful. Migrants from the Middle East have found other exit points. Lebanon is wonderfully generous: it has over 1 million Syrians. Jordan, the same. They are open and they do what they can, hoping to re-integrate. Turkey too has received some migrants. And we in Italy received some. But it is a complex problem, of which we must speak without prejudice, taking into account all these things

that came to my mind.

Gisotti:

Thank you, Holy Father. Have a good dinner, a good journey, and within a week, we will see each other again for another very important journey [to the United Arab Emirates].

Pope Francis:

I thank you very much for your work. I would like to say one more thing about Panama. I sensed a new feeling. I know Latin America but not Panama. And this word came to me: Panama is a “noble” nation. I found nobility [there]. I would like to say this. And I want to say another thing which I said when I returned from Colombia, speaking about the experience of Cartagena and other cities, something which we in Europe do not see: what is the pride in this case of the Panamanians? They hold up their children and say, “This is my victory, this is my future, this is my pride!” In the demographic winter we are experiencing in Europe – below zero in Italy – this should make us think: what is my pride? Tourism, a villa, a small dog or raising a child? Thank you! Pray for me. I need it. Thank you!

Gisotti:

Thank you, Holy Father.

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