The Pope and the crossroads of Europe

There is a very important aspect to the Pope’s two-pronged trip to Bulgaria and North Macedonia which is at risk of being overlooked; beyond the obvious aims of ecumenism and the peace process, the Pope’s visit to this small but crucial section of Europe is significant precisely for the fate of the Old Continent, that is, for the appeals that the Pope puts forth with regard to Europe’s destiny. It is no coincidence that at the end of his final discourse — to priests and religious in Skopje — the Pope quoted a beautiful reflection of Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Patroness of Europe, on the meaning of history: “Certainly, the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed”. We would all like, the Pope continued, to be “strong, powerful and influential”, but history is not the one recounted in textbooks, and these souls can exist only if “we let ourselves think” they do.

And here I am reminded of two statues that accompanied Tuesday’s visit to Skopje:

Land of encounter

Apostolic Journey to Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia

General Audience

Francis recalls key moments in the two nations

Motu Proprio ‘Vos estis lux mundi’

New norms for the whole Church regarding abuse

Pope Francis has issued a new Apostolic Letter in the Form of Motu Proprio entitled “Vos estis lux mundi”, which was presented at a press conference at the Holy See Press Office on Thursday, 9 May.

The new norms stem from recommendations arising from the Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church, for which Bishops from around the world gathered in the Vatican last February.

Among its provisions, the Letter establishes new procedures for reporting abuse and the cover-up of such acts, ensures accountability of Bishops and Religious Superiors, and includes reporting obligations for clerics and religious.

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Archbishop Ignazio Sannia of Oristano, Italy (4 May).

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Roberto Carboni, OFM Conv., as Metropolitan Archbishop of Oristano. Until now he has served as Bishop of Ales-Terralba (4 May).

Archbishop Carboni, 60, was born in Stano Montiffero, Italy. He was ordained a priest on 29 September 1984. He was ordained a bishop on 17 April 2016, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Ales-Terralba.

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Metropolitan Archbishop Luigi Moretti of Salerno-Campagna-Acerno, Italy (4 May).

The Holy Father appointed as Metropolitan Archbishop of Salerno-Campagna-Acerno Fr Andrea Bellandi. Until now he has served as Vicar General of Florence, Italy (4 May).

Archbishop-elect Bellandi, 58, was born in Florence, Italy. He holds a degree in Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Florence on 4 April 1985. He has served in parish ministry and as: full professor of fundamental theology and then president at the Studio Teologico Fiorentino, later known as the Theological Faculty of Central Italy; chaplain to the Montatlo alla Quist; spiritual assistant to university students; Canon of Florence Cathedral and Archbishop’s delegate for the formation of the clergy; vice-president of the Scuola fiorentina di alta formazione per il dialogo interreligioso e interculturale – Florence School of Dialogue; member of the presbyteral council, the diocesan pastoral council and the council for social communication; regional head and member of the national council of Community and Liberation Movement.

The Holy Father accepted the resignation of Archbishop Jaume Pujol Balcells of Tarragona, Spain (4 May).

The Holy Father appointed as Metropolitan Archbishop of Tarragona, Spain Fr Joan Planellas i Barnsos from the clergy of the Diocese of Girona. Until now he has served as Dean of the Faculty of Theology of Catalonia.

Archbishop-elect Planellas i Barnsos, 53, is from the city of Reus.

**Appointments for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Pan-Amazon Region**

On Saturday, 4 May, in view of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Pan-Amazon Region to be held in the Vatican, from 6-27 October on the theme “Amazonia: new pathways for the Church and for an integral ecology”, the Holy Father made the following appointments:

- **as General Rapporteur:** Cardinal Claudio Hummes, OFM, Archbishop emeritus of São Paulo, Brazil, President of the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAAM).
- **as Special Secretaries:** Bishop David Martínez De Aguirre Grijalva, 69, titular Bishop of Iztaccíhuatl, Vicar Apostolic of Puerto Maldonado, Peru; Father Michael Czerny, sj, Undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Diocesary for Promoting Integral Human Development.
New norms for the whole Church against those who abuse or cover up

Pope Francis’ Motu Proprio “Vos estis lux mundi” establishes new procedures for reporting abuse and violence, and ensures that Bishops and Religious Superiors are held accountable for their actions. It includes the obligation for clerics and religious to report abuse. Every Diocese must have a system that allows the public to easily submit reports.

Not only child abuse

The document covers not only violence and abuse against children and vulnerable adults, but also sexual abuse and violence resulting from an abuse of authority as well. This includes cases of violence against religious by clerics, as well as abuse committed against adult seminarians or novices.

Dealing with cover-ups

One of the most important elements is the identification, as a specific category, of so-called cover-ups, defined as “actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil investigations or canonical investigations, whether administrative or penal, against a cleric or a religious regarding the delicts of sexual abuse. This section refers to those who hold positions of particular responsibility in the Church, and who, instead of pursuing abuses committed by others, have hidden them, and have protected alleged offenders instead of protecting the victims.

The protection of vulnerable persons

Vos estis lux mundi stresses the importance of protecting minors (anyone under 18) and vulnerable persons. The definition of a “vulnerable person” is broadened to include “any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental disability, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want to otherwise resist the offense”. In this respect, the new Motu Proprio echoes recent Vatican legislation.

Respecting the laws of states

The obligation to report to the local Ordinary or Religious Superior does not interfere with, or change, any other reporting obligation that may exist in respective countries’ legislation. In fact, the norms “apply without prejudice to the rights and obligations established in each place by state laws, particularly those concerning any reporting obligations to the competent civil authorities”.

The protection of victims and of those reporting abuse

The sections dedicated to protecting those who come forward to report abuse are also significant. According to the provisions of the Motu Proprio, those who report abuse cannot be subjected to “prejudice, retaliation or discrimination” because of what they report. The problem of victims who in the past have been told to keep silent is also addressed: these universal norms provide that “an obligation to keep silent may not be imposed on any person with regard to the contents of his or her report”. Obviously, the seal of confession remains absolute and inviolable and is in no way affected by this legislation. Vos estis lux mundi also states that victims and their families must be treated with dignity and respect and must receive appropriate spiritual, medical and psychological assistance.

The investigation of bishops

The Motu Proprio regulates the investigation of Bishops, Cardinals, Religious Superiors and all those who lead a Diocese, or another particular Church, in various capacities and even temporarily. The rules apply not only in the case of those persons being investigated for having committed sexual abuse themselves, but also if they are accused of having “covered up”, or of failing to pursue abuses of which they were aware, and which it was their duty to address.

The role of the Metropolitan

There are new indications regarding the role of the Metropolitan Archbishop in preliminary investigations: if the accused individual is a Bishop, the Metropolitan receives a mandate from the Holy See to investigate. This strengthens its traditional role in the Church and indicates a desire to make the most of local resources with regard to investigations into Bishops. Every thirty days, the person in charge of the investigation sends the Holy See a “status report on the state of the investigation”, which “is to be completed within the term of ninety days” (extensions for “just reasons” are possible). This establishes specific time frames and requires the Vatican Dicasteries concerned to act promptly.

Involvement of the laity

Citing the article of Canon Law that stresses the important contribution of the laity, the norms of the Motu Proprio provide that the Metropolitan, in conducting the investigations, can avail himself of the help of “qualified persons”, according to “the needs of the individual case and, in particular, taking into account the cooperation that can be offered by the lay faithful”. The Pope has repeatedly stated that the specializations and professional skills of the laity represent an important resource for the Church. The norms now provide that Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses may prepare lists of qualified persons willing to collaborate, but the ultimate responsibility for investigations remains with the Metropolitan.

Presumption of innocence

The principle of presumption of innocence of the person under investigation is reaffirmed. The accused will be informed of the investigation when requested to do so by the competent Dicastery. The accused must be notified only if formal proceedings are opened. If deemed appropriate, in order to ensure the integrity of the investigation or of the evidence, this notice...
In the footsteps of John XXIII
Video message to the people of Bulgaria

The following are the English subtitles to the video message that Pope Francis sent on Friday, 3 May, to the people of Bulgaria ahead of his Apostolic visit to their country from 5 to 7 May, at the invitation of the nation’s highest authorities.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Bulgaria!
With God’s help, in a few days I will be among you. Coming to Bulgaria will be a pilgrimage for me and for my collaborators in the sign of faith, unity and peace. Your land is the home-land of witnesses of the faith, from the time when the Sainit Brothers, Cyril and Methodius, sowed the Gospel there; a fruitful sowing, which has brought abundant fruit even in the difficult times of the last century. This was often repeated by Saint John Paul II, who did so much to en-sure that Europe might rediscover the liberating power of Christ, enabling it to breathe again with two lungs. In his footsteps I will have the joy of meeting His Holiness the Patriarch, and the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Together we will manifest our willing-ness to follow the Lord Jesus on the path of fraternal communion among all Christ-ians.

Dear friends, my pilgrimage will be entirely in the memory of Saint Pope John XXIII, who in the almost 10 years he spent in Sofia as Apostolic Delegate, created with your people a bond of esteem and affection that still endures today. He was a man of faith, communion and peace. That is why I have chosen as the motto for this Journey the title of his historic Encyclical Pacem in Terris – Mir na zemnata”. I ask you please to accompany me with your prayer. Thank you! May God grant peace and prosperity to Bulgaria!

Prayer intention for May
The Church in Africa, seed of hope

In a video illustrating his prayer inten-tion for the month of May, Pope Fran-cis calls for prayers for the Church in Africa, that it may be “the seed of unity” among the many peoples of the continent, as well as “a sign of hope”. According to the 2018 Pontifical Yearbook, 17.6% of the world’s Catholics live in Africa and the numbers of the faithful there continue to rise.

In the scenes forming the backdrop to the Pontif’s message, the video high-lights the extensive social work the Church carries out across the continent in the areas of healthcare and education. The Holy Father expresses his grati-tude to “the religious sisters, priests, laymen and missionaries for their work to create dialogue and reconciliation among the various sectors of African soci-ety”, and explains that the “ethnic, linguistic and tribal divisions in Africa can be overcome by promoting unity in diversity”. Translated into nine lan-guages, the video was prepared for the Pope’s Worldwide Prayer Network by La Machi agency, which is responsible for production and distribution, in collabora-tion with Vatican Media, which recorded it. The video can be viewed at https://thepopevideo.org.

‘Vos estis lux mundi’

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of Bulgaria!
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VATICAN BULLETIN

The Holy Father appointed as Auxiliary Bishop of Armagh, Ireland, Fr Michael Routier from the clergy of Kilmore, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Lugniald. Until now he has served as parish priest of Baliborough (7 May).

Bishop-elect Routier, 54, was born in Rahadrum, Ireland. He holds a degree in theology and a higher diploma in education. He was ordained a priest on 25 June 1989. He has served in parish ministry and as: teacher at St Patrick’s College, Cavan; chap-lain of Baliborough Community School; director of adult faith formation; director of a pastoral centre; vicar forane of the deanery of Baliborough.

NECROLOGY

Bishop Albert-Marie de Monléon, 89, Bishop emeritus of Mceaux, France, at age 82 (29 Apr.)

Bishop Roland Aboujaouéd, titu-lar Bishop of Area di Fencia for Maronites, Curia Bishop emeritus of Antioch for Maron-ites, Lebanon, at age 88 (2 May)

‘Ad limina Apostolorum’ visit

On Thursday morning, 2 May, the Holy Father received in audience members of the Episcopal Conference of Argentina on their visit ‘ad limina Apostolorum’.
Do not close the heart to those knocking at the door

To authorities, representatives of civil society and diplomatic corps

Mr President, Honorable Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Authorities, Representatives of the various Religious Confessions, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Chistos vozrastet!

I am happy to be here in Bulgaria, a place of encounter between many cultures and civilizations, a bridge between Eastern and Southern Europe, an open door to the Near East, and a land of ancient Christian roots that nourish its vocation to foster encounter both in the region and in the international community. Here diversity, combined with respect for distinctive identities, is viewed as an opportunity, a source of enrichment, and not as a source of conflict.

I cordially greet the Authorities of the Republic, and I thank them for the invitation to visit Bulgaria. I thank His Excellency the President for his gracious words of welcome here in this historic Square named after the statesman Atanas Burov, who suffered under a regime that could not tolerate freedom of thought.

I send my respectful greetings to His Holiness Patriarch Neophit, with whom I will shortly meet, to the Metropolitans and Bishops of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and to all the faithful of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. My affectionate greetings go to the Bishops, priests, men and women religious, and all the members of the Catholic Church, whom I have come to confirm in faith and to encourage along their daily path of Christian life and witness.

I also cordially greet the Christians of other Ecclesial Communities, the members of the Jewish community and the followers of Islam. With you, I reaffirm "the firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace, to defend the values of mutual understanding, human fraternity, and harmonious coexistence" (Document on Human Fraternity, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

Let us profit from the hospitality of the Bulgarian people so that every religion, called to foster harmony and concord, can contribute to the growth of a culture and an environment of complete respect for the human person and his or her dignity, by establishing vital links between different civilizations, sensibilities and traditions, and by rejecting every form of violence and coercion. In this way, those who seek by any means to manipulate and exploit religion will be defeated.

My visit today recalls that of Saint John Paul II in May 2002, and evokes the happy memory of the nearly decade-long presence in Sofia of the then Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. The latter never ceased to feel deep gratitude and esteem for your nation, to the point that he once said that wherever he would go, his house would always be open to everyone, Catholic or Orthodox alike, who came as a brother or sister from Bulgaria (cf. Homily, 25 December 1954). Saint John XXIII worked tirelessly to promote fraternal cooperation between all Christians. With the Second Vatican Council, which he convoked and over whose first phase he presided, he gave great encouragement and decisive support to the development of ecumenical relationships.

It is in the wake of these providential events that from 1998 on – a full fifty years ago – an official Delegation composed of the highest civil and ecclesiastical Authorities of Bulgaria has made a yearly visit to the Vatican on the occasion of the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius. These two Saints evangelized the Slavic peoples and were at the origin of the development of their language, their culture, and above all their abundant and enduring fruits of Christian witness and of holiness.

Blessed be Saints Cyril and Methodius, co-patrons of Europe! By their prayers, their genius and their joint apostolic efforts, they serve as an example for us and they continue to be, more than a millennium later, an inspiration for fruitful dialogue, harmony and fraternal encounter between Churches, States and peoples! May their radiant example raise up many followers in our own day and open up new paths of peace and concord!

Now, at this particular moment of history, thirty years after the end of the totalitarian regime that imprisoned its liberty and initiatives, Bulgaria faces the effects of the emigration in recent decades of over two million of her citizens in search of new opportunities for employment. At the same time, Bulgaria – like so many other countries of Europe – must deal with what can only be called a new winter: the demographic winter that has descended like a curtain of ice on a large part of Europe, the consequence of a diminished confidence in the future. The fall in the birth rate, combined with the intense flow of emigration, has led to the depopulation and abandonment of many villages and cities. In addition, Bulgaria confronts the phenomenon of those seeking to cross its borders in order to flee wars, conflicts or dire poverty, in the attempt to reach the wealthiest areas of Europe, there to find new opportunities in life or simply a safe refuge.

Mr President,

I am aware of the efforts that the nation’s leaders have made.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19
The Pontiff to the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church

Differences are not an obstacle to unity

On this journey, we are sustained by great numbers of our brothers and sisters, to whom I would especially like to render homage: the witnesses of Easter. How many Christians in this country endured suffering for the name of Jesus, particularly during the persecution of the last century! The ecumenism of blood! They spread a pleasing perfume over this “Land of Roses”. They passed through the thicket of trials in order to spread the fragrance of the Gospel. They bloomed in fertile and well-cultivated ground, as part of a people rich in faith and genuine humanity that gave them strong, deep roots. I think in particular of the monastic tradition that from generation to generation has nurtured the faith of the people. I believe that these witnesses of Easter, brothers and sisters of different confessions united in heaven by divine charity, now look to us as seeds planted in the earth and meant to bear fruit. While so many other brothers and sisters of ours throughout the world continue to suffer for their faith, they ask us not to remain closed, but to open ourselves, for only in this way can those seeds bear fruit.

Your Holiness, this meeting, which I have greatly desired, follows that of Saint John Paul II with Patriarch Maxim during the first visit of the Bishop of Rome to Bulgaria. It also follows in the footsteps of Saint John XXIII, who, in the years he lived here, became greatly attached to this people, “so simple and good” (Giornale dell’anima, Bologna, 1968, 352), valuing their honesty, their hard work and their dignity amid trials. Here, as a guest welcomed with affection, I experience a deep fraternal nostalgia, that healthy longing for unity among children of the same Father that was felt with growing intensity by Pope John XXII, during his time in this city. During the Second Vatican Council, which he convened, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sent observers, and from that time on, our contacts have multiplied. I think of the visits that, for fifty years now, Bulgarian delegations have made to the Vatican and which I annually have the joy of receiving; so too, the presence in Rome of an Orthodox Bulgarian community that prays in one of the churches of my Diocese. I appreciate the gracious welcome given to my envoy, whose presence has increased in recent years, and the cooperation shown with the local Catholic community, especially in the area of culture. I am confident that, with the help of God, and in his good time, these contacts will have a positive effect on many other dimensions of our dialogue. In the meantime, we are called to journey and act together in order to bear witness to the Lord, particularly by serving the poorest and most neglected of our brothers and sisters, in whom he is present. The ecumenism of the poor.

We are called to journey and act together in order to bear witness to the Lord, particularly by serving the poorest and most neglected of our brothers and sisters, in whom he is present. The ecumenism of the poor.

Our guides on this journey are, above all, Saints Cyril and Methodius, who have linked us since the first millennium and whose living memory in our Churches continues to be a source of inspiration, for despite adversities they made their highest priority the proclamation of the Lord, the call to mission. As Saint Cyril put it: “With joy I set out for the Christian faith; however weary and physically weak, I will go with joy” (Vita Constantini, VI, 7, XIX, 9). And despite premonitions of the painful divisions which would take place in centuries to come, they chose the prospect of communion. Mission and communion: two words that distinguished the labours of these two saints and that can illuminate our own journey towards growth in fraternity. The ecumenism of mission.

Cyril and Methodius, Byzantines by culture, were daring enough to translate the Bible into a language accessible to the Slavic peoples, so that the divine Word could precede human words. Their courageous apostolate remains today a model of evangelization and a challenge to proclaim the Gospel to the next generation. How important it is, while respecting our own traditions and distinctive identities, to help one another to find ways of passing on the faith in language and forms that allow young people to experience the joy of a God who loves them and calls them! Otherwise, they will be tempted to put their trust in the deceitful sirens songs of a consumerist society.

Communion and mission, closeness and proclamation. Saints Cyril and Methodius also have much to say to us about the future of European society. Indeed, “they were in a certain sense the promoters of a united Europe and of a profound peace among all the continent’s inhabitants, showing the basis for a new art of living together, with respect for differences, which in no way are an obstacle to unity” (SAIN T JOHN PAUL II, Greeting to the Official Bulgarian Delegation, 24 May 1999, Insernatum XXI, n 1 [1999], 1056). We too, as heirs of the faith of the saints, are
On Sunday afternoon, 5 May, the Pope celebrated Mass in Knyaz Aleksander I Square in Sofia. In his homily he reminded the faithful of “three amazing things that are part of our lives as disciples: God calls, God surprises, God loves”. The following is the English text of the Pope’s homily.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Christ is risen!

It is wonderful to see how with these words Christians in your country greet one another in the joy of the Risen Lord during the Easter season.

The entire episode we have just heard, drawn from the final pages of the Gospels, helps us immerse ourselves in this joy that the Lord asks us to spread. It does so by reminding us of three amazing things that are part of our lives as disciples: God calls, God surprises, God loves.

God calls. Everything takes place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus first called Peter. He had called him to leave behind his trade as a fisher in order to become a fisher of men (cf. Lk 5:4-11). Now, after all that had happened to him, after the experience of seeing the Master die and hearing news of his resurrection, Peter goes back to his former life. He tells the other disciples, “I am going fishing”. And they follow suit: “We will go with you” (Jn 21:3). They seem to take a step backwards, Peter takes up the nets he had left behind for Jesus. The weight of suffering, disappointment, and of betrayal had become like a stone blocking the hearts of the disciples. They were still burdened with pain and guilt, and the good news of the resurrection had not taken root in their hearts.

The Lord knows what a strong temptation it is for us to return to the way things were before. In the Bible, Peter’s nets, like the flesh-pots of Egypt, are a symbol of a tempting nostalgia for the past, of wanting to take back what we had decided to leave behind. In the face of failure, hurt, or even the fact that at times things do not go the way we want, there always comes a subtle and dangerous temptation to become disheartened and to give up. This is the tomb psychology that tinges everything with depression and leads us to indulge in a soothing sense of self-pity that, like a moth, eats away at all our hope. Then the worst thing that can happen to any community begins to appear – the grim pragmatism of a life in which everything appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 8).

But it was at the very moment of Peter’s failure that Jesus appears, starts over, patiently comes to him and calls him “Simon” (v. 17) – the name Peter received when he was first called. The Lord does not wait for perfect situations or frames of mind: he creates them. He does not expect to meet big and successful people without problems, disappointments, without sins or limitations. He himself confronted sin and disappointment in order to encourage all men and women to persevere. Brothers and sisters, the Lord never tires of calling us. His is the power of a Love that overturns everything expectation and is always ready to start anew. In Jesus, God always offers us another chance. He calls us day by day to deepen our love for him and to be revived by his eternal newness. Every morning, he comes to find us where we are. He summons us “to rise at his word, to look at it and take it in hand” (ibid.).

We can now turn to the third amazing thing: God calls and God surprises, because God loves. Love is his language. That is why he asks Peter, and us, to learn that language. He asks Peter: “Do you love me?” And Peter says yes; after spending so much time with Jesus, he now understands that to love means to stop seeking “the living among the dead” (Homily at the Easter Vigil, 20 April 2019). When we welcome him, we rise higher and are able to embrace a brighter future, not as a possibility but as a reality. When Jesus’s call directs our hearts to be revived, do not fear, then: the Lord loves your life, even when you are afraid to look at it and take it in hand” (ibid.).

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Pope Francis prays before the throne of Saints Cyril and Methodius.
Sunday’s Regina Caeli

Land of encounter

On Sunday afternoon, 5 May, Pope Francis led the recitation of the Regina Caeli in Sofia’s Saint Aleksander Nevsky Square, outside the Patriarchal Cathedral of the same name, where he had spent a moment in private prayer before the Throne of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s greeting with which he introduced the Marian antiphon.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is risen!

With these words, Christians — Orthodox and Catholic — here in Bulgaria have from ancient times greeted one another in the Easter season: Christos victor! These words express great joy for the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil, over death. They are an affirmation and a testimony of the very heart of our faith: Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world. Everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to each of you are these: Christ is alive, and he wants you to be alive! He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. He walks with you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He continually calls you, he waits for you to return to him and start over again. He is never afraid to start over again: he always gives us his hand for us to begin again, to get up and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, — sadness ages us — resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope (cf. Christus victor, i—2). He lives, he wants you to live and he walks with you.

This faith in Christ, risen from the dead, has been proclaimed for two thousand years in every part of the world, thanks to the generous missionary effort of so many believers, called to give themselves completely and selflessly to the spread of the Gospel. In the history of the Church, also here in Bulgaria, there have been many pastors outstanding for the holiness of their lives. Among them, I readily recall my predecessor whom you call “the Bulgarian saint”, Pope John XXIII, a holy pastor whose memory is particularly honoured in this land, where he lived from 1957 to 1964. Here he learned to esteem the traditions of the Eastern Church and built friendly relationships with the other religious confessions. His diplomatic and pastoral experience in Bulgaria left so deep a mark on his pastor’s heart that he was led to promote in the Church the prospect of ecumenical dialogue, which received a notable impulse in the Second Vatican Council, which he himself wished to convene. In a certain sense, we can thank this land for the sage and inspired intuition of “good Pope John”.

In pursuing this ecumenical journey, I will shortly have the joy of greeting the representatives of various religious confessions of Bulgaria, which, while an Orthodox country, is a crossroads where various religious expressions encounter one another and engage in dialogue. The very welcome presence in this meeting of representatives of these different communities is a sign of the desire of all to pursue the increasingly necessary journey towards “the culture of dialogue as a path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard” (Document on Human Fraternity, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

We find ourselves near the ancient church of Saint Sofia, and next to the Patriarchal Church of Saint Aleksander Nevsky, where just now I prayed in memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the evangelizers of the Slavic peoples. As evidence of my esteem and affection for this venerable Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, I have had the joy of greeting and embracing my brother, His Holiness Patriarch Neofit and the Metropolitan of the Holy Synod. Let us now turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of heaven and earth, asking her to intercede before the Risen Lord, that he may grant this beloved land the necessary impulse always to be a land of encounter. A land in which, transcending all cultural religious and ethnic differences, you can continue to acknowledge and esteem each other as children of the one heavenly Father. We make our plea with the song of the ancient prayer, Regina Caeli. We make that prayer here, in Sofia, before the icon of Our Lady of Nessebar, whose name means “Gate of Heaven”, so dear to my predecessor Saint John XXIII, who began to venerate her here in Bulgaria, and carried her with him to the day of his death. Regina caeli, laetare, alleluia!

Visit to refugee camp

The following is the English text of Pope Francis’ greeting as he visited the refugee camp of Voizhdinoma in Sofia on Monday, 6 May.

Thank you very much for your welcome. Thank you to the children, for their very beautiful song. They bring joy on your path. Your path is not always easy, and then there is the sadness of leaving your homeland and seeking to adapt to another country. Yet there is always hope. Today, the world of migrants and refugees is something of a cross, a cross for humanity, and a cross that so many people suffer from. I thank you for your goodwill, and I wish all the best for you and your fellow citizens whom you have left behind in your homeland. May God bless you, and please pray for me.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to greet the young boys and girls who will receive their First Communion and their parents, relatives and friends. To all of you, I offer the beautiful greeting exchanged in your country at Easter time: “Christos voskrese!” This greeting is the expression of our joy as Christians, as disciples of Jesus. We rejoice because for love of us, Jesus gave his life on the cross and destroyed sin. He rose again and made us adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. We are joyful because he is alive and present among us, today and always.

Dear boys and girls, you have come here from every corner of this “Land of Roses” to take part in a wonderful celebration. I am sure you will never forget this day: your first encounter with Jesus in the sacrament of your first Communion, your sacrament of initiation, your sacrament of love. One of you might ask me: How can we meet Jesus? He lived a long time ago, but then he died and was laid in the tomb! It is true: Jesus carried out an immense act of love to save human beings of all times. He remained in the tomb for three days, but we know — the Apostles and many other witnesses who saw him alive have assured us — that God, his Father and ours, raised him up. Now Jesus is alive and is here with us. That is why we can encounter him today in the Eucharist. We do not see him with our physical eyes, but we do see him with the eyes of faith.

I am looking at you, dressed in your white robes. What a meaningful, beautiful sign. You are dressed for a celebration! First Communion is, above all, a celebration. We celebrate Jesus, who wants to remain always by our side. He will always be with us. This celebration was made possible also thanks to our parents and grandparents, our families and our communities, who have helped us to grow in the faith.

You have travelled a long way to come here to Rakovski. Your priests and catechists, who have accompanied you in your preparation for this day, have also accompanied you on the road that today leads you to meet Jesus and to receive him in the road that today leads you to the road that today leads you to the road that today leads you to see him with the eyes of faith.

We celebrate Jesus, who wants to receive you! Today you have made it possible for us to relive that joy and to celebrate Jesus, present in the Bread of Life. Some miracles can only take place if we have a heart like yours: a heart capable of sharing, dreaming, feeling, gratitude, trusting and respecting other people. Making your First Communion shows that you want to grow in friendship with him and to lead other people to share in the joy he wants us to feel. The Lord needs you, because he wants to work the miracle of bringing his joy to many of your friends and family members.

Dear boys and girls, I am happy to share this great moment with you and help you meet Jesus. For you, this is a day to be celebrated in a spirit of friendship, a spirit of joy and fraternity. In a spirit also of communion among yourselves and with the whole Church, which, especially in the Eucharist, expresses the communion that makes all of us brothers and sisters. This is our identity card: God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, the Church is our family. All of us are brothers and sisters, and our love is love. Today you have made it possible for us to relive that joy and to celebrate Jesus, present in the Bread of Life. Yes! Because Jesus is coming! Let’s all say together: “I am happy because Jesus is coming”.

At this point the Holy Father began a dialogue with the children, making use of a Bulgarian interpreter.

[Pope Francis] Dear boys and girls, welcome! I’m happy to see you here making your First Communion. I’ll ask you a question: Are you happy to make your First Communion? [Children] Yes! [Pope Francis] Are you sure?

[Children] Yes!

[Pope Francis] Why are you happy? Because Jesus is coming! Let’s all say together: “I am happy because Jesus is coming”.

[Children] I am happy because Jesus is coming!

[Pope Francis] To all of you gathered here to receive Jesus — I’ll ask a question — Are you all the same family?

[Children] Yes!

[Pope Francis] What is our family called?

[Children] The Church.

[Pope Francis] Our family name is Christian.

[Children] Yes!

[Pope Francis] What is our family name?

[Children] Christian.

[Pope Francis] Good! In my homily I said something that I want you always to remember. I spoke about the "identity card" of a Christian, and I said: “This is our identity card: God is our Father, Jesus is our brother, the Church is our family. All of us are brothers and sisters, and our love is love”. Now let’s repeat it together. I will say it again, the interpreter will say it, and we will all repeat it together: God is our Father.

[Children] God is our Father.

[Pope Francis] Jesus is our brother.

[Children] Jesus is our brother.

[Pope Francis] The Church is our Mother and our family.

[Children] The Church is our Mother and our family.

[Pope Francis] We are enemies…

[Children] We are…

[Pope Francis] Is that true? Are we enemies?

[Children] No!

[Pope Francis] We are friends! We are friends, all of us! We are brothers and sisters.

[Children] We are brothers and sisters.

[Pope Francis] Our law is love.

Everybody!

[Children] Our law is love!
I would like to share with you an experience I had a few hours ago. This morning I visited the Vrazhdebska refugee camp and met asylum-seekers and refugees from various countries of the world who are looking for a better place to live than the one they left. I also met the Caritas volunteers [applause for the Caritas volunteers who stand up, each one wearing red T-shirt]. When I came in here and saw the Caritas volunteers, I asked who they were because I thought they were fire fighters! All in red! [at Vrazhdebska Centre] They told me that the heart of the Centre’s — this refugee has been opened by making himself one of us. It is never easy to be a neighbour, but harm the soul, causing hope to die, and waste the best of our energy. When I think of a pessimist, I think of one who destroys, who does not see the good in life, who looks at the world with scepticism, discomfort or disparagement. 

We must share the hope that the Pope has given us — that the Church is a home with open doors, always! Pope John was one who did not want to save us by decree, but came into our midst. He put his own flesh and blood, his own life, his own heart into the midst of adversity is capable of understanding a little more fully why this land was so dear and important to Saint John XXIII. Here he developed strong friendships with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, and this led him on a path that would help foster the longed-for, yet ever fragile sense of fraternity between individuals and communities.

To see with the eyes of faith. I would like to recall something that Pope John once said: “Good Pope John” was so attuned to the Lord that he could register his disagreement with those around him who saw nothing but evil and refer to them as “prophets of doom”. He was convinced of the need to trust the Lord, who did not want to save us by decree, but came into our midst. And this is the heart of the Centre’s — this refugee has been opened by making himself one of us. It is never easy to be a neighbour, but harm the soul, causing hope to die, and waste the best of our energy. When I think of a pessimist, I think of one who destroys, who does not see the good in life, who looks at the world with scepticism, discomfort or disparagement. We must share the hope that the Pope has given us — that the Church is a home with open doors, always! Pope John was one who did not want to save us by decree, but came into our midst. He put his own flesh and blood, his own life, his own heart into the midst of adversity is capable of understanding a little more fully why this land was so dear and important to Saint John XXIII. Here he developed strong friendships with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, and this led him on a path that would help foster the longed-for, yet ever fragile sense of fraternity between individuals and communities.

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This is a great thing! Each parish serves as a home to its people, welcoming all who enter. The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother. Something that a great priest wrote really struck me: "Every priest who serves the Church very much. He was also a priest and a sinner, he knew he was a sinner, but he went to Our Lady and wept before her. He wrote a poem once, asking forgiveness from Our Lady and resolving never to separate himself from the Church. This is what he wrote: "This evening, my Lady, my promise is sincere. But, just in case, don’t forget to leave the key on the outside of the door." Mary and the Church never close the door from inside! If they do close the door, the key is always on the outside: you can open it. And this is our hope. The hope of reconciliation. Trying to make present the Kingdom of God, a Church, a family and a community that takes up the knotty problems of life, which are often like balls of tangled wool; before untangling them, it is necessary to make them own, taking them into its hands and loving them. A mother does this too: when she sees her son or daughter “knotted in difficulties”, she never leaves them, she takes those difficulties, she untangles them in hands, makes them own and solves them. Our Church-who-is-a-mother does this. This is how we must look at her. She is the mother who accepts us as we are, with our difficulties, even with our sins. She is a mother, she always knows how to sort things out. Isn’t it wonderful to have a mother like that? Never separate yourself from her, never leave the Church! Because if you do go away, you will lose your memory of the Church’s motherhood: you will start to think badly of your Mother the Church, and then, when she comes to you, the more that image of a mother will become the image of a cruel stepmother. And the stepmother is inside your heart; the Church is a mother.

It is good to know that you can count on a great livinghistory, but it is even more beautiful to realize that you are being asked to write its next chapter. These pages have not been written. You have to write them. The future is in your hands. Catholic priests and bishops, those people who every day meet the elderly and the young people, when they feel uprooted and alone. Our young people, when they feel disappointed, when they are forced to leave behind their homes, their country and their family.

Let us not be afraid to meet new challenges, as long as we make every effort to ensure that our people never lack the light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus. I would like to emphasize what I said about young people, who so often lose their roots. Today, in the world, there are two groups of people who suffer a great deal: young people and the elderly. We must help them meet up. The elderly are the roots of our society; we cannot send them away from our community; they are the living memory of our faith. Young people need roots, need memory. Let us ensure that they can communicate between each other, without fear. There is a beautiful prophecy of the prophet Joel: "Your old men shall dreams, and your young men will see visions" (cf. 3:17). When young people meet the elderly and the elderly meet the young, the elderly start to live again, start dreaming again, and young people take courage from that; they go forwards and begin to do what is most important in their lives, that is, to “spend time” with the future. We need young people to “become familiar” with the future, but this can only happen if they have roots of the elderly. When I arrived here in the parish, there were many elderly in the streets, many older men and women. They were smiling. They have treasure inside them. And there were many young people who also greeted and smiled. May they meet up with each other! May the elderly give to the young this ability to prophesy, that is, to “spend time” with the future. These are the wages of today. And let us not be afraid. Let us meet new challenges, as long as we make every effort to ensure that our people never lack the light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus, a community of faith to support them, and ever new horizons that can give them meaning and a goal in life (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 49). We must never forget that the most beautiful chapters in the life of the Church were written when God’s People set out with creativity to translate the love of God in their own time, with the challenges they gradually encountered. A united people, the People of God, with the sensus fidei which is proper to it. It is good to know that you can count on a great livinghistory, but it is even more beautiful to realize that you are being asked to write its next chapter. These pages have not been written. You have to write them. The future is in your hands. Catholic priests and bishops, those people who every day meet the elderly and the young people, when they feel uprooted and alone. Our young people, when they feel disappointed, when they are forced to leave behind their homes, their country and their family.

Thank you... I haven’t finished! I’m still tormenting you a little more – thank you for this very enjoyable meeting. And, thinking of Pope John, I would like the blessing I now give you to be a caress of the Lord for each of you. Pope John had given this blessing with his wish that it be a caress, that blessing he gave in the moonlight [at the opening of the Second Vatican Council].

Let us pray together, let us ask Our Lady who is the image of the Church. Pray in your language. [They write the Hail Mary in Bulgarian]. [Blessing]
Peace is a gift and a task for all

Meeting with Bulgaria’s interfaith leaders

God calls, surprises and loves

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

The Lord loves us: this is the source of our strength and we are asked to reaffirm it each day. Being a Christian is a summons to realize that God’s love is greater than all our disappointments and sins. One of our great disappointments and difficulties today comes not from knowing that God is love, but that our way of proclaiming and bearing witness to him is such that, for many people, this is not his name. God is love, a love that bestows it-

here in Sofia, the heart of Bul-

garia. From here, we can see the places of worship of the different Churches and religious Confes-
sions: Saint Nedelya of our Or-
thodox brothers and sisters, Saint Joseph of us Catholics, the syn-
agogue of our older brothers, the Jews, the mosque of our Muslim brothers and sisters and, closer to us, the Armenian church.

For many centuries, the Bul-
garians of Sofia belonging to dif-
ferent cultural and religious groups gathered in this place for meetings and discussions. May this symbolic place become a wit-
tness to peace. Tonight our voices blend in expressing our ardent de-
sire for peace. Let there be peace on earth in our families, in our

hearts, and above all in those places where so many voices have been silenced by war, stifled by indifference and ignored due to the powerful complicity of interest groups. May all work together to make this dream come true: reli-
gious, political and cultural lead-
ers. May each of us, wherever we may be, in all that we do, be able to say: ‘Lord, you are an instrument of your peace’.

It is a plea that the dream of Pope Saint John XXIII will come true: the dream of an earth where peace is always at home. Let us share in that aspiration and, by the witness of our lives, let us say: Peace in terra! Let there be peace on earth to all those whom the Lord loves.

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called to be builders of communion and peacemakers in the name of Je-
sus. Bulgaria is a “spiritual cross-
roads, a land of contacts and mutual understanding” (id., Address at the Arrival Ceremony, Sofia, 23 May 2002: Insegnamenti, X X V, 1 [2002], 86q). Here various confessions, from the Armenian to the Evangelical, different religious traditions, from the Jewish to the Muslim, have found a welcome. The Catholic Church has met with acceptance and respect both in her Latin tradition and in her Byzantine-Slavic tradi-
tion. I am grateful to Your Holiness and the Holy Synod for this bene-
volent reception. In our relation-
ships, too, Saints Cyril and Metho-
dius remind us that, “far from being an obstacle to the Church’s unity, the diversity of customs and observ-
earny adds to her beauty” and that between East and West “various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting” (Uniatii Redintegr,
atto, 16-17). “We can learn so much from one another (Evangelii Gaudi-
um, 246)! Your Holiness, shortly I will be able to visit the Patriarchal Cathed-
ral of Saint Alexander Nevski and to pray there in memory of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Saint Aleksan-
der Nevski, from the Russian tradi-
tion, and the Holy Brothers, from the Greek tradition and apostles of the Slavic peoples, show us the extent to which Bulgaria is a bridge-
country. Your Holiness, dear Broth-
ers, I assure you of my prayers for you, for the faithful of this beloved people, for the lofty location of this place, and for our journey in an ecumenism of blood, of the poor and of mission. In turn, I ask a place in your prayers, in the cer-
tainty that prayer is the door that opens to every path of good-
ness. I thank you once again for the wel-
come I have received and I assure you that I will cherish the memory of this fraternal encounter. Christus vobiscum!

Today we are called to lift up our 
your time on earth and constant-
to the very end. The Lord loves us: this is the source of our strength and we are asked to reaffirm it each day. Being a Christian is a summons to realize that God’s love is greater than all our disappointments and sins. One of our great disappointments and difficulties today comes not from knowing that God is love, but that our way of proclaiming and bearing witness to him is such that, for many people, this is not his name. God is love, a love that bestows it-
self, that calls and surprises.

Here we see the miracle of God, who makes of our lives works of art, if only we let ourselves be led by his love. Many of the witnesses of Easter in this blessed land created magnificent masterpieces, in-
spired by simple faith and great love. Offering their lives, they be-
came living signs of the Lord, overcomeing apathy with courage and offering a Christian response to the concerns that they en-
countered (cf. Christus Vivit, 174). Today we are called to lift up our 
yes and acknowledge what the Lord has done in the past, and to

walk with him towards the future, knowing that, whether we succeed or fail, he will always be there to call us to tell us to cast our nets.

Here I would like to repeat what I said to young people in my re-
cent Exhortation. A young Church, young not in terms of age but in the grace of the Spirit, is inviting us to testify to the love of Christ, a love that inspires and directs us to strive for the common good. This love enables us to serve the poor and to become protagonists of the revolution of charity and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial in-
dividualism. Bribbing with the love of Christ, he living witnesses of the Gospel in every corner of this city (cf. Christus Vivit, 174-175). Do not be afraid of becoming the saints that this land greatly needs. Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, it will take away none of your vitality or joy. On the contrary, you and all the sons and daughters of this land will become what the Father had in mind when he created you (cf. Gaudete et Exsultate, 32).

Called, surprised and sent for love!
In the Republic of North Macedonia the Pope emphasizes the country’s multietnic and multicultural richness

**European integration with respect for diversity and rights**

Mr President,
Mr Prime Minister,
Honourable Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Civil and Religious Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very grateful to the President of the Republic of North Macedonia for his kind words of welcome and for the gracious invitation to visit North Macedonia that he, together with the Prime Minister, extended to me.

I also thank the representatives of the other religious communities present among us. I offer a warm greeting to the Catholic community, represented here by the Bishop of Skopje and Eparch of the Eparchy of Blessed Virgin Mary of the Assumption in Strumica-Skopje, which is an active and integral part of your society, sharing fully in the joys, concerns and daily life of your people.

This is the first time that the Successor of the Apostle Peter has come to the Republic of North Macedonia. I am happy to do so on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See, which occurred a few years after the country became independent in September 1991.

Your land, a bridge between East and West and a meeting-point for numerous cultural currents, embodies many of the distinctive marks of this region. With the elegant testimonies of its Byzantine and Ottoman past, its lofty mountain fortresses and the splendid iconostases of its ancient churches, which speak of a Christian presence dating back to apostolic times, North Macedonia reflects all the depth and richness of its millennial culture. But allow me to say that these great cultural treasures are themselves only a reflection of your more precious patrimony: the multietnic and multi-religious counter-

ance of your people, the legacy of a rich and, indeed, complex history of relationships forged over the course of centuries.

This crucible of cultures and ethnic and religious identities has resulted in a peaceful and enduring coexistence in which those individual identities have found expression and developed without rejecting, dominating or discriminating against others. They have shown a greater disposition for tolerance, they have been able to demonstrate respect. They have thus given rise to a fabric of relationships and interactions that can serve as an example and a point of reference for a serene and fraternal communal life.

Video message to people of North Macedonia

**Seeds of fraternity**

The following are the English subtitles to the video message that Pope Francis sent to the people of North Macedonia ahead of his 7 May Apostolic visit to the country at the invitation of the nation’s highest authorities.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of North Macedonia!

Through this brief message I would like to express to you my joy and the feelings of affection I feel for your people and for the Church in your land. After your country gained independence, the Holy See sought to establish friendly and diplomatic relations with it. Today more than ever there is a need to promote in Europe and throughout the world the culture of encounter and of fraternity, and I will come among you to sow these seeds, sure in the knowledge that yours is good soil, and that it will be able to welcome them and bear fruit. The particular beauty of your country comes from the variety of cultures and ethnic and religious affiliations that inhabit it. Living together is not always easy; we know that. But it’s worth struggling toward because the most beautiful mosaics are the ones that are richest in colors.

I entrust my visit to the intercession of a great saint, a daughter of your land: Mother Teresa. Born and raised in Skopje, through the grace of God she became a courageous missionary of Christ’s charity in the world, giving comfort and dignity to the poorest of the poor.

Dear friends, let us prepare our meeting through prayer, so that it may bear fruits of peace and all things good for all your people. God bless you!

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Visit to the Mother Teresa Memorial

Attentive to the cry of the poor and the least

On Tuesday morning, 7 May, the Pope traveled by car from the Presidential Palace in Skopje, to the nearby Memorial dedicated to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was born in the North Macedonian capital. In the presence of the country’s religious leaders, Francis recited a prayer in honour of the Saint, then met poor people who receive assistance from the Missionaries of Charity, which was founded by Mother Teresa. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s prayer.

God, Father of mercy and all goodness, we thank you for giving us the life and the charism of Saint Mother Teresa. In your boundless providence, you called her to hear witness to your love among the poorest of the poor in India and throughout the world. She was able to do much good to those in greatest need, for she saw in every man and woman the face of your Son. Docile to your Spirit, she became the prayerful cry of the poor and of all those who hunger and thirst for justice. Taking up the words uttered by Jesus on the cross: “I thirst” (Jn 19:28), Mother Teresa sated the thirst of the crucified Lord by accomplishing works of merciful love.

Saint Mother Teresa, mother of the poor, we ask for your special intercession and help, here in this city where you were born, where you had your home. Here you received the gift of rebirth in the sacraments of Christian initiation. Here you heard the first words of faith in your family and in the community of the faithful. Here you began to see and meet people in need, the poor and the helpless. Here you learned from your parents to love those in greatest need and to help them. Here, in the silence of the church, you heard the call of Jesus to follow him as a religious in the missions.

Here in this place, we ask you to intercede with Jesus, that we too may obtain the grace to be watchful and attentive to the cry of the poor, those deprived of their rights, the sick, the outcast and the least of our brothers and sisters. May he grant us the grace to see him in the eyes of all who look to us in their need. May he grant us a heart capable of loving God present in every man and woman, a heart capable of recognizing him in those who experience suffering and injustice. May he grant us the grace to become signs of love and hope in our own day, when so many are poor, abandoned, marginalized and migrants. May he grant that our love not only be on our lips, but that it be effective and genuine, so that we may bear credible witness to the Church whose duty it is to proclaim the Good News to the poor, freedom to prisoners, joy to the afflicted and the grace of salvation to all.

Saint Mother Teresa, pray for this city, for this people, for its Church and for all those who wish to follow Christ, the Good Shepherd, as his disciples, by carrying out works of justice, love, mercy, peace and service. To follow him, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for many: Christ our Lord. Amen.

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European integration with respect for diversity and rights

ing of goods the route to all authentic development. It is my hope that you will cherish the chain of solidarity that emerged from that emergency, and thus support all volunteer efforts to meet the many different forms of hardship and need.

I wish likewise to pay homage in a very special way to one of your illustrious fellow-citizens, who, moved by the love of God, made love of neighbour the supreme law of her life. She won the admiration of the whole world and pioneered a specific and radical way of devoting one’s life to the service of the abandoned, the discarded, and the poorest of the poor. I am naturally referring to the woman universally known as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Born in 1910 in a suburb of Skopje with the name of Anjezë Gonxha Bojaxhiu, she carried out her apostolate of humble and complete self-giving in India and, through her Sisters, reached out to the most varied geographical and existential peripheries. I am pleased that I will shortly be able to pause in prayer at the Memorial dedicated to her, built on the site of the Church of the Sacred Heart, where she was baptized.

You are rightly proud of this great woman. I urge you to continue to work in a spirit of commitment, dedication and hope, so that the sons and daughters of this land, following her example, can reach ever greater heights in attaining and fully developing the vocation that God has envisaged for them.

Mr President,

From the time that North Macedonia gained its independence, the Holy See has closely followed the steps that this country has taken to advance dialogue and understanding between the civil authorities and religious confessions.

Today, God’s providence offers me the chance to demonstrate personally this closeness and to express gratitude as well for the yearly visit made to the Vatican by an official Delegation of yours on the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius. I encourage you to persevere with confidence along the path you have taken, in order to make your country a beacon of peace, acceptance and fruitful integration between cultures, religions and peoples. Drawing from their respective identities and the vitality of their cultural and civil life, they will thus be able to build a common destiny in openness to the enrichment that each has to offer.

May God protect and bless North Macedonia, preserve it in concord, and grant it prosperity and joy!
Hunger for fraternity and mercy

Pope Francis ended his morning in Skopje on Tuesday, 7 May, by celebrating Mass in Macedonia Square. During his homily, which centred on the Gospel episode of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, the Pontiff recalled that the Lord also invites us to share ourselves with him, so as “to be part of that miraculous multiplication”. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s homily, which was delivered in Italian.

“All those people discovered that hunger for bread has other names: hunger for God, hunger for fraternity, hunger for encounter and a shared feast. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (Jn 6:35). We have just heard the Lord speak these words.

In the Gospel, a crowd had gathered around Jesus. They had just seen the multiplication of the loaves; it was one of those events that remained etched in the mind and heart of the first community of disciples. There had been a party, a feast that showed God’s superabundant generosity and concern for his children, who became brothers and sisters in the sharing of bread. Let us imagine for a moment that crowd. Something had changed. For a few moments, those thirsting and silent people who followed Jesus in search of a word were able to touch with their hands and feel in their bodies the miracle of a fraternity capable of satisfying superabundantly.

The Lord came to give life to the world. He always does so in a way that defies the narrowness of our calculations, the mediocrity of our expectations and the superficiality of our rationalizations. A way that questions our viewpoints and our certainties, while inviting us to move to a new horizon enabling us to view reality in a different way. He is the living Bread come down from heaven, who tells us: “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst”.

All those people discovered that hunger for bread has other names too: hunger for God, hunger for fraternity, hunger for encounter and a shared feast.

We have become accustomed to eating the stale bread of disinformation and ending up as prisoners of dishonour, labels and ignominy. We thought that conformism would satisfy our thirst, yet we ended up drinking only in difference and insensitivity. We fed ourselves on dreams of splendour and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, solitude and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking, and lost the taste of fraternity. We looked for quick and easy solutions, only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety. Prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavour of the truly real.

Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: Lord, we are hungry. We are hungry, Lord, for the bread of your word, which can open up our insularity and our solitude. We are hungry, Lord, for an experience of fraternity in which indifference and ignorance will not fill our tables or take pride of place in our homes. We are hungry, Lord, for encounters where your word can raise hope, awaken tenderness and sensitize the heart by opening paths of transformation and conversion.

We are hungry, Lord, to experience, like that crowd, the multiplication of your mercy, which can break down our stereotypes and communicate the Father’s compassion for each person, especially those for whom no one cares: the forgotten or despised. Let us not be afraid to say it clearly: we are hungry for bread, Lord, the bread of your word, the bread of fraternity.

In a few moments, we will approach the table of the altar, to be fed by the Bread of Life. We do so in obedience to the Lord’s command: “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (Jn 6:35). All that the Lord asks of us is that we come. He invites us to set out, to be on the move, to go forth. He urges us to draw near to him and to become sharers in his life and mission. ‘Come’, he says, for the Lord, that does not mean simply moving from one place to another. Instead, it means letting ourselves be moved and transformed by his word, in our choices, our feelings and our priorities, daring in this way to adopt his own way of acting and speaking. For his is “the language of bread that speaks of tenderness, companionship, generous dedication to others” (Corpus Christi Homily, Buenos Aires, 1995), the language of a love that is concrete and tangible, because it is daily and real.

In every Eucharist, the Lord breaks and shares himself. He invites us to break and share ourselves together with him, and to be part of that miraculous multiplication that desires to reach out and touch, with tenderness and compassion, every corner of this city, this country, and this land.

Hunger for bread, hunger for fraternity, hunger for God. How well Mother Teresa knew all this, and desired to build her life on the twin pillars of Jesus incarnate in the Eucharist and Jesus incarnate in the poor! Love received and love given. Two inseparable pillars that marked her journey and kept her moving, eager also to quench her own hunger and thirst. She went to the Lord exactly as she went to the despised, the unloved, the lonely and the forgotten. In drawing near to her brothers and sisters, she found the face of the Lord, for she knew that “love of God and love of neighbour become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (Deus Caritas Est, 15). And that love alone was capable of satisfying her hunger.

Brothers and sisters, today the Risen Lord continues to walk among us, in the midst of our daily life and experience. He knows our hunger and he continues to tell us: ‘Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’ (Jn 6:35). Let us encourage one another to get up and experience the abundance of his love. Let us allow him to satisfy our hunger and thirst: in the sacrament of the altar and in the sacrament of our brothers and sisters.

At the conclusion of Mass and before imparting the final blessing, the Holy Father added the following:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Before the final blessing, I feel bound to express my gratitude to all of you. I thank the Bishop of Skopje for his kind words and especially for the great effort that went into preparing for this day. Along with him, I thank all those who assisted in any way, priests, religious and lay faithful. My deep thanks to all!

Once more, I express my gratitude to the civil Authorities of the country, the forces of order and the volunteers. The Lord will surely repay you as he knows best. For my part, I remember you in my prayers and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

Mass in Skopje’s Macedonia Square

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Faith must lead us believers to see other persons as our brothers and sisters that we need to support and love.

(@Pontifex)

Ecumenical and interreligious meeting with young people in Skopje

Do not be afraid to dream

On Tuesday afternoon, 7 May, Pope Francis attended an ecumenical and interreligious meeting with young people at the pastoral centre in the North Macedonian capital, where he gave an address and concluded the encounter with a prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.

Dear Friends,

Having these meetings always gives me joy and hope. Thank you for making this possible and offering me this opportunity. I am very grateful for your dance – so beautiful – and for your questions. I knew about these questions: I received them as a thought about them, and so I have prepared some points to reflect with you on these questions.

I will begin with the last question: after all, as the Lord said, the last shall be first! Liridona, after you shared your hopes with us, you asked me: “Am I dreaming too much?” A very fine question, and I would like all of us to answer it together. What do you think? Is Liridona dreaming too much?

Let me tell you that one can never dream too much. One of the big problems people have today, including so many young people, is that they have lost their ability to dream. They don’t dream, either much or little. When someone does not dream, when a young person does not dream, that empty space gets filled with complaints and a sense of hopelessness or sadness. “We can leave that to those who worship the ‘goddess of lament’… She is a false goddess: she makes you take about little things, ‘on the ground level’, but she dreamed in a big way and you, young people, should dream big.

A few months ago, a friend of mine, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, and I had a dream much like yours, that made us want to make a commitment and sign a document that says that faith must lead us believers to see other persons as our brothers and sisters. As brothers and sisters that we need to support and love, without letting ourselves be manipulated by petty interests. We are old and it’s not the age to have dreams, but you, please dream and dream big!

This makes me think of what Bozanka told us. She said that, as young people, you like adventures. I am glad about that, for it is a beautiful way to be young: to experience an adventure, a good adventure. Young people do not fear making of their lives a good adventure. So I would ask you: what adventure requires more courage than the dream that Liridona shared with us, the dream of giving hope to a weary world? Our world is weary; our world has become old. The world is divided, and we can be tempted to keep it divided, and to become divided ourselves. There are those adults who want us to be divided; be on your guard. Yet how forcefully do we hear our Lord’s words: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt 5:9)? What can give us more excitement than being committed daily to becoming faithful builders of dreams, artisans of hope? Dreaming helps us to keep alive our certainty that another world is indeed possible, and that we are called to get involved, to help build that world through our work, our efforts and our actions.

In this country, you have a fine tradition of stonecarving, practised by artisans skilled at cutting stone and working it. We need to become like those craftsmen, to become expert carvers of our own dreams. We need to work at our dreams. A stonecarver takes a stone in his hands and slowly begins to shape and transform it with concentration and effort, and especially with a great desire to see how that stone, which no one thought was worth anything, can become a work of art.

“Our best dreams are only attained through hope, patience and commitment, and not in haste, like these artisans. At the same time, we should not be hesitant, afraid to take chances or make mistakes. No, do not be afraid. Rather, we should fear experiencing the paralysis of the living dead, who have no life because they are afraid to take risks. And young people who do not take risks are dead. Some don’t want to take risks because they don’t want to persevere in their commitments or they fear making mistakes. Even if you make mistakes, you can always get up and start over, for no one has the right to rob our dreams (cf. Christus Vivit, 17); be on your guard. Let us not deprive ourselves of the newness that the Lord wants to give us. You will encounter many, many unexpected twists and turns in life, but it is important to face them and find creative ways of turning them into opportunities. But never alone! No one can fight alone. As Dragan and Marija told us: “Our communion gives us strength to face the challenges of today’s society.”

Taking up what Dragan and Marija said: “Our communion gives us the strength to face the challenges of contemporary society”. Here is a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation; no one can live the face of faith or realize his or her dreams alone, without leaving home, without being part of a community, alone at heart or at home, enclosed and isolated behind four walls. We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead.

How important it is to dream together! Just as you are doing

our personal vocation, the beauty of prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, the beauty of love for the poor, and social friendship (ibid., 57).

Think of Mother Teresa: when she lived here, she could not have imagined where her life would have ended up. Yet she kept dreaming and tried to see the face of her great love, Jesus, and to discover it in all those people on the sides of the road she passed, and also in a big way, and this is why she also loved in a big way. She had her feet firmly planted here, in her native land, but she didn’t stand still. She wanted to be a “pencil in the hands of God”. This was the dream she crafted. She offered it to God, she believed in it, she suffered for it, and she never gave it up. And God began to write new and amazing pages of history with that pencil, a woman from your land, who dreamed, who wrote great things. It is God who wrote them but she dreamed and allowed herself to be guided by God.

Each of you is called, like Mother Teresa, to work with your hands, to take life seriously and make something beautiful of it. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of our dreams (cf. Christus Vivit, 17); be on your guard. Let us not deprive ourselves of the newness that the Lord wants to give us. You will encounter many, many unexpected twists and turns in life, but it is important to face them and find creative ways of turning them into opportunities. But never alone! No one can fight alone. As Dragan and Marija told us: “Our communion gives us strength to face the challenges of today’s society.”

Certainly, as members of the Church, we should not stand apart from others. All should regard us as friends and neighbours, like the apostles, who, as the Bible says, enjoyed the good will of all the people” (Acts 2:47; cf. 4:10-13). Yet at the same time we must dare to be different, to point to ideals other than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity, perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to
today: everyone together, here in one place, without barriers. Please, dream together, not by yourselves; dream with others, never against others! Dream with others and never against others! By yourselves, you risk seeing mirages, seeing things that are not there. Dreams are built together.

A few minutes ago we saw two children playing here. They wanted to play! We observed them: they were happy, content. Because they dreamed of playing together, with one another. Did you see this? Yet, at a certain point, one of them realized that the other was stronger, and instead of dreaming with the other, began to dream against the other, and tried to overcome the other. And that joy changed as we saw the weaker one in tears, on the floor. You saw how we can pass from dreaming with others to dreaming against others. Never dominate others! Build up community with others: this is the joy of moving ahead. This is very important. Dragan and Marjia have told us how difficult this can be, when everything conspires to isolate us and deprive us of the opportunity to encounter one another, the opportunity of “dreaming with others”. Now at my age (and I am not young!), do you want to know what I think was the best lesson I ever learned? It was how to talk to people “face-to-face.” We have entered into the digital age, but actually we know very little about communication. Many contacts, but we communicate little. We are all “connected”, but not really “involved” with one another. Getting involved requires life; it calls for being there and sharing the good times but also the not so good times. At last year’s Synod on young people, we were able to have the experience of meeting one another face to face, both the young and the not-so-young. We were able to listen to one another, to dream together and to look to the future with hope and gratitude. That was the best antidote to discouragement and manipulation, to too many contacts without communication, to the culture of the ephemeral and to all those false prophets who proclaim only misfortune and destruction. The antidote is listening, listening to one another. And now, let me tell you something I feel very strongly about: give yourselves a chance to share and enjoy a good “face-to-face” with everyone, but especially with your grandparents, with the children of your community. Perhaps some of you have heard me say this, but for me that is an antidote to those who would lock you up in the present, overwhelming you with pressures and demands, all in the name of an alleged happiness, as if the world is about to end and you have to experience everything right away. In the long run, this creates anxiety, dissatisfaction and a sense of hopelessness. For a heart tempted by hopelessness, there is no better remedy than listening to the experiences of older people.

Dear friends, spend time with the elderly, listen to their stories, which may sometimes seem a bit unreal but in fact are full of rich experiences, eloquent symbols and a hidden wisdom waiting to be discovered and appreciated. Those stories take time to tell (cf. Christi Fidélis, 195). Don’t forget the old saying that a little person can see further by standing on the shoulders of a giant. In this way, you will gain a new and broader vision. Enter into the wisdom of your people, your community, enter without shame or hesitation, and you will discover an unexpected source of creativity which will prove most fulfilling. It will let you perceive paths where others see barriers, possibilities where others see threats, resurrection where so many proclaim only death.

For this reason, dear young people, I tell you to speak with your grandparents and with your elders. They are your roots, the roots of your history, the roots of your people, the roots of your families. You should hold on tight to your roots to receive the sap that will make the tree grow, flourish and bear fruit, but always holding onto your roots. I do not say that you should go underground with those roots: no, not this. But you should journey and listen to these roots and take from them the strength needed to grow, to move forward. If a tree’s roots are cut off, that tree dies. If your roots as young people are cut off, which are the roots of the history of your people, you will die. Yes, you will live, but without bearing fruit: your country, your people will not be able to bear fruit because you have removed yourselves from your roots.

When I was a child, we were told at school that when the Europeans went to discover America, they took with them coloured glass. This was shown to the Indians, to the indigenous peoples, and they were enthralled by the coloured glass which they had never seen before. And these Indians forgot their roots and bought this glass in exchange for gold. So gold was robbed by means of coloured glass. The glass was a novelty and they gave everything to have this novelty which was worth nothing. You, young people, please be on your guard, because today also there are those who want to conquer, those who want to colonize, offering you coloured glass: this is ideological coloniza-
tion. They will come to you and say: “No, you must be a more modern people, more advanced, order to bring an infant into the world, because she looks forward, she looks at history. Because she feels the strength of the roots that help her bring forth life, her country and her people.

And let us conclude together applauding all the young people, all the courageous women who have listened to you, to the interpreter who has been really good!

Prayer of Mother Teresa

Do you need my hands, Lord?

Do you need my hands, Lord, to help the sick and the poor who are in need today? Lord, this day I offer you my hands.

Do you need my feet, Lord, to lead me today to those who need a friend? Lord, this day I offer you my feet.

Do you need my voice, Lord, so that I can speak to all those who need a word of love? Lord, this day I offer you my voice.

Do you need my heart, Lord, so that I can love everyone, without exception? Lord, this day I offer you my heart.

Never lose the ability to caress

After meeting with young people at the pastoral centre in Skopje on Tuesday afternoon, 7 May, Pope Francis visited the Catholic Cathedral dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where he met with priests and their families, along with men and women religious of North Macedonia. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address, which accompanied the final event of his Apostolic Journey.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to meet you. I am particularly grateful for this moment, in which I can see the Church breathing fully with both her lungs – the Latin rite and the Byzantine rite – and taking in the evangelism and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Two lungs that are necessary and complementary, that help us better to taste the beauty of the Lord (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 18). Let us give thanks for this chance to breathe deeply, as one, and to sense how good the Lord has been with us.

I thank you for your testimonies, which I would now like to take up. You mentioned the fact that you are few in number and risk giving in to a certain inferiority complex. While I was listening to you, I thought of Mary, who took a pound of pure nard, anointed herself with the tenderness of her glance, com- bined the fragrance of the perfume with her hair, wiped them dry with her hair. The Evangelist concludes his description of the scene by saying: “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (Jn 12:3). That nard was able to permeate everything, leaving an unmistakable impression.

In more than a few situations, we feel the need to “take stock” and see where things stand. We can begin by looking at our numbers, which I would now like to take up. You mentioned the fact that you are few in number and risk giving in to a certain inferiority complex. While I was listening to you, I thought of Mary, who took a pound of pure nard, anointed herself with the tenderness of her glance, combined the fragrance of the perfume with her hair, wiped them dry with her hair. The Evangelist concludes his description of the scene by saying: “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (Jn 12:3). That nard was able to permeate everything, leaving an unmistakable impression.

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Never lose the ability to caress

Thus I stress the importance of tenderness. Today I received the grace of observing sisters who show much tenderness: when I went to the Mother Theresa memorial I saw the religious sisters there and the way they cared for the poor with profound tenderness. Please: tenderness. Never raise your voice. Blessed water, not vinegar! Always with that sweetness of the Gospel that knows how to caress souls. Recalling a word mentioned by our brother: he spoke of carerservium. When carerservium enters priestly ministry and religious life, the heart becomes hardened and bitter and it loses tenderness. The priest or sister who is careerist has lost the ability to caress.

Do not close the heart to those knocking at the door

For years to ensure that young people, in particular, not be constrained to emigrate. I would encourage you to persevere on this path, to strive to create conditions that lead young people to invest their youthful energies and plan their future, as individuals and families, knowing that in their homeland they can have the possibility of leading a dignified life. To all Bulgarians, who are familiar with the drama of emigration, I respectfully suggest that you not close your eyes, your hearts or your hands – in accordance with your best tradition – to those who knock at your door.

Your country has always distinguished itself as a bridge between East and West, capable of favouring encounters between the different cultures, ethnic groups, civilizations and religions that for centuries have lived here in peace. The development of Bulgaria, including her economic and civil development, necessarily entails a recognition and enhancement of this specific trait. May this land, bordered by the great Danube River and by the shores of the Black Sea, rendered fruitful by the humble labour of so many generations, open to cultural and commercial exchanges, integrated in the European Union, and with solid links to Russia and Turkey, offer all her sons and daughters a future of hope.

May God bless Bulgaria, keep her in peace and ever hospitable, and grant her prosperity and happiness!

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ing during the times of difficulty that you had to endure. The union of marriage, the grace of marriage in the life of ministry has helped you to walk together in this way, as a family.

Your testimony has that “Gospel fragrance” of the first communities. Let us remember that “the New Testament speaks of ‘churches that meet in homes’ (cf. 1 Cor 16:20; Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Phil 2). A family’s living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist — how many times have you celebrated the Eucharist in your home — the presence of Christ seated at its table. We can never forget the image found in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord says: ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me’ (3:20). This is the image of a home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and every blessing” (Amoris Laetitia, 15). In this way, you give a vivid witness of how “faith does not remove us from this world, but draws us more deeply into it” (ibid., 18). The world may not be the way we would like it, nor the way we would like it to be, but it is the image found in the Book of Revelation that dominates the entire Middle East. The development of Christianity, especially in the East and West, capable of favouring encounters between different cultures, ethnic groups, civilisations and religions for centuries has not been in peace. The development of Bulgaria, including her economic and civil development, necessarily entails a recognition and enhancement of this specific trait. May this land, bordered by the great Danube River and by the shores of the Black Sea, rendered fruitful by the humble labour of so many generations, open to cultural and commercial exchanges, integrated in the European Union, and with solid links to Russia and Turkey, offer all her sons and daughters a future of hope. May God bless Bulgaria, keep her in peace and ever hospitable, and grant her prosperity and happiness!

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The Pope and the crossroads of Europe

North Macedonia: the first – before which the Pope gathered himself in prayer — that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a small statue of the petite sister actually born in Skopje; and the second, the enormous equestrian monument to Alexander the Great, posted upon an imposing column that dominates the entire Macedonian Square, the site of the morning’s Papal Mass. Alexander and Terra, power and tenderness, strength and mercy, authority and service.

In this journey to lands situated at the crossroads of Europe, places of encounter and conflict among different hearts, ethnicities and traditions, the Pope recalled that this continent has always been (and still is) a crossroads that is not geographic but spiritual. Today the challenge is between security and solidarity, but it is an ancient challenge. It was clearly understood by the great English historian Arnold Toynbee when he affirmed, in Mankind and Mother Earth, that since the 14th century when the Western man has professedly honoured Francis Bernardone, the saint who renounced the inheritance of a lucrative family business and who was rewarded with the stigmatisation of Christ for his esposal of Our Lady of the Poor. “But the example that Western man has actually followed has not been Saint Francis”; Western man has emulated the Saint’s father, Pietro Bernardone, the successful wholesale cloth merchant.”

Today a Pope who chose the name Francis is acting in the heart of Europe, and he asks Western man which direction he wishes to take, knowing full well that history has not yet been written once and for all, but is ever open to the newness of the Spirit who removes all things, even old continents.

ANDREA MONDA
Pope recalls significant moments of his visit to the Balkans

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I returned late last evening from a three-day Apostolic Journey that led me to Bulgaria and North Macedonia. I thank God for having allowed me to make these visits, and I renew my gratitude to the Civil Authorities of these two countries that welcomed me with great courtesy and openness. I offer my most cordial “thank you” to the Bishops and the respective ecclesial communities, for the devout warmth with which they accompanied my pilgrimage.

In Bulgaria I was guided by the memory of Saint John XXIII, who was sent to that country in 1955 as Visitor and then as Apostolic Delegate. Animated by his example of benevolence and pastoral charity, I met that people, called to build a bridge between Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, with the motto “Paxem in Terris” I invited everyone to walk on the path of fraternity and, on this path, in particular, I had the joy of taking a step forward in the meeting with Patriarch Neofit of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Members of the Holy Synod. Indeed, as Christians, our vocation and mission is to be a sign and instrument of unity, and we can be so, with the help of the Holy Spirit, by putting what unites us before what divides us or still divides us.

Present day Bulgaria is one of the lands evangelized by Saints Cyril and Methodius, whom the two brother Saints. Of Greek origin, from Thessaloniki, they were able to use their culture creativity to pass on the Christian message to the Slavic peoples; they invented a new alphabet with which to translate the Bible and liturgical texts into the Slavic language. Today too there is need for passionate and creative evangelizers, so that the Gospel may reach those who still do not know it, that it may again irrigate the lands where the ancient Christian roots have withered. With this horizon I celebrated the Eucharist twice with the Catholic community in Bulgaria and I encouraged them to be hopeful and fraternal. I again thank that People of God who showed me so much faith and so much affection.

The last event in Bulgaria took place together with representatives of the different religions: we invoked God for the gift of peace, while a group of children carried lighted torches, a symbol of faith and hope.

In North Macedonia I was accompanied by the strong spiritual presence of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was born in Skopje in 1910, and there, in her parish, received the Sacraments of Christian initiation and learned to love Jesus. In this woman, petite but powerful thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, we see the image of the Church in that country and in other peripheries of the world: a small community which, with Christ’s grace, becomes a welcoming home where many find solace in life. At the Mother Teresa Memorial, I prayed in the presence of other religious leaders and a large group of poor people, and I blessed the foundation stone of a shrine dedicated to her.

North Macedonia has been an independent country since 1991. The Holy See has sought to support its journey from the very start. With my visit, I wanted to encourage above all its traditional ability to host different ethnic groups and to get involved like young people, in Skopje I also listened to those of priests and consecrated people. Men and women who have given their lives to Christ. For them, sooner or later there is the temptation to say: “Lord, what is my small gift before the problems of the Church and of the world?” Therefore I reminded them that a bit of love can make the whole dough rise, and a little pure and intense perfume can pervade the whole area with a pleasant aroma.

In addition to the testimonies of young people, in Skopje I also listened to those of priests and consecrated people. Men and women who have given their lives to Christ. For them, sooner or later there is the temptation to say: “Lord, what is my small gift before the problems of the Church and of the world?” Therefore I reminded them that a bit of love can make the whole dough rise, and a little pure and intense perfume can pervade the whole area with a pleasant aroma.

It is the mystery of Jesus-Eucharist, the seed of new life for all of humanity. During the Mass we celebrated in Skopje Square, we renewed in a periphery of present day Europe, the miracle of God who, with a few broken and shared loaves and fish, satisfies the hunger of the multitude. Let us entrust the present and the future of the peoples I visited on this journey to his inexhaustible Providence. And I invite all of you to pray that Our Lady may bless these two countries: Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

After paying the Hail Mary, the Holy Father continued as follows:

In Mexico City last Saturday, Maria de la Conception Cabrera was proclaimed Blessed, the mother of a family who witnessed to the salvific value of Christ’s Cross, inspiring the founding of various religious and lay institutions. Let us give thanks to God for this courageous witness. An applause for Blessed Conchita!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from Denmark, England, Nigeria, Kenya, India, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

I offer a special greeting to young people, the elderly, the sick and the newweds. Today is the day dedicated to the Supplication to Our Lady of Pompeii. We were joined in spirit with those gathered in that Marian Shrine as well as with those elsewhere who will gather together at noon to faithfully recite the Supplication to Our Lady, so that she may turn her gaze upon the world and intercede for the entire Church and for those who suffer in body and in spirit.

Moreover, the Solemnity of Our Lady of Luján is being celebrated in my country today: Let us all pray together for Argentina.