



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS
TO MALTA
(2-3 APRIL 2022)

PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT TO ROME

Papal flight
Sunday, 3 April 2022

[Multimedia]

Matteo Bruni

Good evening everyone. Your Holiness, thank you for these two days with you. As you have seen, travelling with you in these days are around 70 journalists, of whom three are from Malta. And we can begin perhaps with a question from a Maltese journalist, who is Mr. Andrea Rossitto from Maltese Television. But first I will make a note: our time is limited because the airplane will begin landing soon. So we will be able to speak with Your Holiness until around 8:05. Then we will need time to land and to take pictures with the crew. In the meantime, maybe, Your Holiness, you would like to say something...

Pope Francis

I am sorry that [time] is so short because we are scheduled to land at 8:15 and we have to take pictures. This is why we will conclude at 8:05. But thank you for your cooperation.

Matteo Bruni

And you for your availability. Go ahead Andrea.

Andrea Rossitto (TVM)

Your Holiness, thank you first off for your presence in Malta. My question is about this morning's surprise visit at the chapel where St. George Preca is buried. What motivated you to make this surprise visit, and what will you remember about your visit to Malta? And how is your health? We saw you during this very intense trip. We can say it went well. Thank you very much.

Pope Francis

My health is a bit unpredictable because I have this problem with my knee that causes problems with getting about, with walking. It's a bit annoying, but it's improving, and at least I can get around. Two weeks ago, I couldn't do anything. It's a slow thing; we'll see if it goes away. But there's uncertainty. At this age, we don't know how the game will end. Let's hope it goes well.

And then about Malta. I was happy with the visit. I saw the realities of Malta; the people's impressive enthusiasm, both on Gozo and on Malta, in Valletta and in the other places. A great enthusiasm in the streets. I was amazed. [The visit] was a bit short. One of the problems I saw in your regard is migration. The problem of migrants is serious because Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy and Spain are the closest countries to Africa and the Middle East, and [migrants] land here, they arrive here... Migrants must always be welcomed! The problem is that each government has to say how many they can receive regularly to live there. This requires an agreement among the countries of Europe, and not all of them are willing to receive migrants. We forget that Europe was made by migrants, right? But that's the way things are... At the very least let us not leave all the burden to these neighbouring countries that are so generous. And Malta is one of them. Today I was in the migrant welcome centre, and the things I heard there are terrible, the suffering of these people to get here... and then the lagers—they are *lagers*—which are on the Libyan coast, when they are sent back. This seems criminal. That's why I think it's a problem that touches everyone's heart. Just as Europe is so generously making room for the Ukrainians who knock on the door, so too is it doing for others who cross the Mediterranean. This is a point with which I finished the visit, and it touched me very much, because I listened to the testimonies, the sufferings, which are more or less like those—I think I told you about them—in that little book, "*Hermanito*" in Spanish, "little brother"; and all the *Via Crucis* of these people. One of those who spoke today had to pay four times! I ask you to think about this. Thank you.

Matteo Bruni

Thank you. The second question, Your Holiness, is from Jordi Antelo Barcia, from Spain's National Radio.

Jordi Antelo Barcia (RNE)

Good evening, Your Holiness. I will read because my Italian is still not that good. On the flight that took us to Malta, you told one of my colleagues that a trip to Kyiv "is on the table." While in Malta you referred many times to your closeness to the Ukrainian people. On Friday in Rome, the Polish President opened the door to your possible visit to the Polish border. Today we were struck by the images coming from Bucha, a village near Kyiv, abandoned by the Russian army where Ukrainians have found dozens of bodies in the streets, some with their hands tied, as if they had been "executed." It seems, today, that your presence there is increasingly necessary. Do you think such a trip is feasible? And what conditions would have to be in place for you to be able to go there?

Pope Francis

Thank you for conveying this news from today that I was not yet aware of. War is always an act of cruelty, an inhuman thing, that goes against the human spirit; I don't say Christian, [I say] human. It is the spirit of Cain. I am willing to do whatever needs to be done, and the Holy See, especially the diplomatic side, Cardinal Parolin and Archbishop Gallagher, are doing everything... everything possible. We cannot make public everything they do, out of prudence and confidentiality, but we are pushing the boundaries of our work. Among the possibilities there is the trip. There are two possible trips: the President of Poland proposed one of them, asking me to send Cardinal Krajewski to visit the Ukrainians who have been welcomed in Poland. [The Cardinal] has already been there twice, took two ambulances, and he was there with them for some time. But he will go again; he is willing to do so. The other trip that some of you have asked about. I answered sincerely that I was planning to go, that I am always willing. There is no automatic "no." I am available.

What are my thoughts regarding such a trip? This was the question: "We heard that you were thinking about a trip to Ukraine," and I said, "It is on the table." The idea is there, among the proposals I have received, but I don't know if it can be done, if it is fitting, and whether it would be for the best or if it is fitting to undertake it, whether I should go... all this is up in the air. Then, for some time, there have been considerations regarding a meeting with Patriarch Kirill; that's what's being worked on, with the possibility of holding the meeting in the Middle East. This is where things are at the moment.

Matteo Bruni

Thank you. And maybe let's see if we have time for a question from Gerry O'Connell, from America Magazine.

Gerry O'Connell (America Magazine)

Father, several times during this trip you have talked about war. The question everyone is asking is whether or not, since the beginning of the war, you have spoken to President Putin, and if not, what would you say to him today?

Pope Francis

The things which I have said to the Authorities on all sides are public. None of the things I have said are confidential. When I spoke to the Patriarch, he then released a nice statement of what we said to each other. I spoke to the President of Russia at the end of last year when he called me to convey his best wishes. We talked. Then, I have also spoken to the President of Ukraine, twice. So, on the first day of the war, I felt I had to go to the Russian Embassy to speak to the Ambassador, who is the representative of the people, and ask questions and offer my impressions regarding the situation. These are the official contacts I have had. With Russia I did it through the Embassy.

Also, I have spoken to the Major Archbishop of Kyiv, Mons. Shevchuk. I have also spoken regularly—every two or three days—with one of you, Elisabetta Piqué, who is now in Odessa. But I spoke to her when she was in Lviv. She tells me how things are going. I have also spoken with the rector of the seminary there, through a message to the seminarians and the people there. I am also in contact with one of your representatives. Speaking of that, I would like to give my condolences for your colleagues who have fallen. Whatever side they are on, it doesn't matter. However, your work is on behalf of the common good, and they have fallen in service of the common good, on behalf of information. Let's not forget them. They were brave, and I pray for them that the Lord will reward them for their work. These have been the contacts I have had so far.

Gerry O'Connell

But what would be your message for Putin if you had a chance to talk to him?

Pope Francis

The message I have given to all the Authorities is the one I have given publicly. I do not say two different things. It is always the same.

I think that behind your question there is also doubt about just and unjust wars. Every war stems from an injustice, always, because that is the pattern of war. It is not a pattern for peace. For example, making investments to buy weapons. Some people say, 'But we need them to defend ourselves.' And this is the pattern of war. When World War II ended, everyone breathed and said, "never again war: peace!" A surge of work for peace began, with the goodwill not to produce any more weapons, even atomic weapons at that time, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That was a

great intention.

Seventy years later, eighty years later, we have forgotten all that. That's how it is: the pattern of war imposes itself. There was so much hope in the work of the United Nations then. But the pattern of war has imposed itself again. We cannot, we are incapable of imagining another pattern. We are not used to thinking of the pattern of peace anymore. There have been great people like Ghandi and many others, whom I mentioned at the end of the *Encyclical Fratelli Tutti*, who wagered on the pattern of peace. But we are stubborn! As humanity, we are stubborn. We are in love with wars, with the spirit of Cain. It is not by chance that at the beginning of the Bible this problem is presented: the "Cainist" spirit of killing instead of the spirit of peace. 'Father, it can't be!' I'll tell you something personal. In 2014, when I was in Redipuglia and saw the names [of the departed], I cried. Really, I cried out of bitterness. Then, a year or two later, I went to celebrate [Mass] in Anzio for All Souls' Day, and saw the names of the young men who fell while landing there. The names were there, all young men, and I cried there, too. I really did. I did not understand. We must cry on the graves. I respect, because there is a political problem, but for the commemoration of the Normandy landings, several heads of government came together to commemorate it. But I don't remember anyone talking about the 30,000 young soldiers who were left on the beaches. The boats would open, they would get out and were gunned down there, on the beaches. Does youth not matter? This makes me wonder and pains me. I am pained by what is happening today. We never learn. May the Lord have mercy on us, on all of us. Every one of us is guilty!

Matteo Bruni

Thank you, Your Holiness. Maybe we're tight on time at this point...

Pope Francis

I thank you very much for your work, for the information. Thanks a lot. And I hope to see you on another trip. Thank you for your patience, thank you for your information. And let's move forward. Thank you! Have a good landing!