



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

### to CANADA

(24 - 30 JULY 2022)

## MEETING WITH CIVIL AUTHORITIES, REPRESENTATIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

### *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS*

*"Citadelle de Québec"*

*Wednesday, 27 July 2022*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Madam Governor General,*

*Mr Prime Minister,*

*Distinguished Civil and Religious Authorities,*

*Dear Representatives of the Indigenous Peoples,*

*Honourable Members of the Diplomatic Corps,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I cordially greet you and I thank Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon and His Excellency Justin Trudeau for their kind words. I am happy to be able to address you, who have the responsibility of serving the people of this great country that, “from sea to sea”, displays an extraordinary natural heritage. Among its many beauties, I think of the immense and spectacular maple forests that make the Canadian countryside uniquely colourful and variegated. I would like to take as my starting point the symbol *par excellence* of these lands, the maple leaf, which, starting from the seal of Québec, rapidly spread to become the emblem that appears on the national flag.

That development took place in relatively recent times, but the maple trees preserve the memory of many past generations, going back well before the colonists arrived on Canadian soil. The native peoples extracted maple sap, with which they concocted wholesome and healthy syrups. This makes us think of their industriousness and their constant concern to protect the land and the environment, in fidelity to a harmonious vision of creation as an open book that teaches human beings to love the Creator and to live in symbiosis with other living creatures. We can learn much from this ability to listen attentively to God, to persons and to nature. And we need it, especially amid the dizzying and frenzied pace of today's world, marked by a constant "rapidification", which makes difficult a truly human, sustainable and integral development (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 18), and ends up creating "a society of weariness and disillusionment", which finds it hard to recover the taste for contemplation, authentic relationships, the mystique of togetherness. How much we need to listen to and dialogue with one another, in order to step back from the prevailing individualism, from hasty judgments, widespread aggressiveness and the temptation to divide the world into good people and bad! The large size of the maple leaves, which absorb polluted air and in turn give out oxygen, invite us to marvel at the beauty of creation and to appreciate the wholesome values present in the indigenous cultures. They can inspire us all, and help to heal harmful tendencies to exploitation. Exploiting creation, relationships, time and basing human activity solely on what proves useful and profitable.

These vital teachings, however, were violently opposed in the past. I think above all of the policies of assimilation and enfranchisement, also involving the residential school system, which harmed many indigenous families by undermining their language, culture and worldview. In that deplorable system, promoted by the governmental authorities of the time, which separated many children from their families, different local Catholic institutions had a part. For this reason, I express my deep shame and sorrow, and, together with the bishops of this country, I renew my request for forgiveness for the wrong done by so many Christians to the indigenous peoples. It is tragic when some believers, as happened in that period of history, conform themselves to the conventions of the world rather than to the Gospel. The Christian faith has played an essential role in shaping the highest ideals of Canada, characterized by the desire to build a better country for all its people. At the same time, it is necessary, in admitting our faults, to work together to accomplish a goal that I know all of you share: to promote the legitimate rights of the native populations and to favour processes of healing and reconciliation between them and the non-indigenous people of the country. That is reflected in the commitment to respond in a fitting way to the appeals of the *Commission for Truth and Reconciliation*, as well as in the concern to acknowledge the rights of the native peoples.

The Holy See and the local Catholic communities are concretely committed to promoting the indigenous cultures through specific and appropriate forms of spiritual accompaniment that include attention to their cultural traditions, customs, languages and educational processes, in the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is our desire to renew the relationship between the Church and the indigenous peoples of Canada, a relationship marked

both by a love that has borne outstanding fruit and, tragically, deep wounds that we are committed to understanding and healing. I am very grateful to have encountered and listened to various representatives of the indigenous peoples in recent months in Rome, and to be able, here in Canada, to renew the good relations established there. The time we spent together made an impression on me and left a firm desire to respond to the indignation and shame for the sufferings endured by the indigenous peoples, and to move forward on a fraternal and patient journey with all Canadians, in accordance with truth and justice, working for healing and reconciliation, and constantly inspired by hope.

That “history of suffering and contempt”, the fruit of the colonizing mentality, “does not heal easily”. Indeed, it should make us realize that “colonization has not ended; in many places it has been transformed, disguised and concealed” (*Querida Amazonia*, 16). This is the case with forms of ideological colonization. In the past, the colonialist mentality disregarded the concrete life of people and imposed certain predetermined cultural models; yet today too, there are any number of forms of ideological colonization that clash with the reality of life, stifle the natural attachment of peoples to their values, and attempt to uproot their traditions, history and religious ties. This mentality, presumptuously thinking that the dark pages of history have been left behind, becomes open to the “cancel culture” that would judge the past purely on the basis of certain contemporary categories. The result is a cultural fashion that levels everything out, makes everything equal, proves intolerant of differences and concentrates on the present moment, on the needs and rights of individuals, while frequently neglecting their duties with regard to the most weak and vulnerable of our brothers and sisters: the poor, migrants, the elderly, the sick, the unborn... They are the forgotten ones in “affluent societies”; they are the ones who, amid general indifference, are cast aside like dry leaves to be burnt.

Instead, the rich multicolored foliage of the maple tree reminds us of the importance of the whole, the importance of developing human communities that are not blandly uniform, but truly open and inclusive. And just as every leaf is fundamental for the luxuriant foliage of the branches, so each family, as the essential cell of society, is to be given its due, because “the future of humanity passes through the family” (SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). The family is the first concrete social reality, yet it is threatened by many factors: domestic violence, the frenetic pace of labour, an individualistic mindset, cutthroat careerism, unemployment, the loneliness and isolation of young people, the abandonment of the elderly and the infirm... The indigenous peoples have much to teach us about care and protection for the family; among them, from an early age, children learn to recognize right from wrong, to be truthful, to share, to correct mistakes, to begin anew, to comfort one another and to be reconciled. May the wrongs that were endured by the indigenous peoples, for which we are ashamed, serve as a warning to us today, lest concern for the family and its rights be neglected for the sake of greater productivity and individual interests.

Let us return to the maple leaf. In wartime, soldiers used those leaves for bandages and for soothing wounds. Today, before the senseless folly of war, we have once again need to heal

forms of hostility and extremism and to cure the wounds of hatred. A witness of tragic acts of violence in the past recently observed that “peace has its own secret: never to hate anyone. If we want to live we must never hate” (*Interview with Edith Bruck, Avvenire, 8 March 2022*). We have no need to divide the world into friends and enemies, to create distances and once again to arm ourselves to the teeth: an arms race and strategies of deterrence will not bring peace and security. We need to ask ourselves not how to pursue wars, but how to stop them. And to prevent entire peoples from once more being held hostage and in the grip of terrible cold wars that are still increasing. What we need are creative and farsighted policies capable of moving beyond the categories of opposition in order to provide answers to global challenges.

In fact, the great challenges of our day, like peace, climate change, the effects of the pandemic and international migration movements, all have one thing in common: they are global challenges; they regard everyone. And since all of them speak of the need to consider the whole, politics cannot remain imprisoned in partisan interests. We need to be able to look, as the indigenous wisdom tradition teaches, seven generations ahead, and not to our immediate convenience, to the next elections, or the support of this or that lobby. But we need also to appreciate the yearning of young people for fraternity, justice and peace. In order to preserve memory and wisdom, we need to listen to the elderly, but in order to press forward towards the future, we also need to embrace the dreams of young people. They deserve a better future than the one we are preparing for them; they deserve to be involved in decisions about the building of the world of today and tomorrow, and particularly about the protection of our common home; in this regard, the values and teachings of the indigenous peoples are precious. Here I would like to express appreciation for the praiseworthy commitment being made on the local level to protecting the environment. It could even be said that the symbols drawn from nature, such as the fleur-de-lis in the flag of this Province of Québec, and the maple leaf in that of the country, confirm Canada’s ecological vocation.

When the Commission for the creation of the national flag set about evaluating the thousands of sketches submitted for that purpose, many of them by ordinary people, it proved surprising that almost all of them contained the image of the maple leaf. The convergence around this shared symbol leads me to bring up an essential word for all Canadians: *multiculturalism*. Multiculturalism is fundamental for the cohesiveness of a society as diverse as the dappled colours of the foliage of the maple trees. With its multiple points and sides, the maple leaf reminds us of a polyhedron; it tells us that you are people capable of inclusion, such that new arrivals can find a place in that multiform unity and make their own original contribution to it (cf. *Evangeliij Gaudium*, 236). Multiculturalism is a permanent challenge: it involves accepting and embracing all the different elements present, while at the same time respecting their diverse traditions and cultures, and never thinking that the process is complete. In this regard, I express my appreciation for the generosity shown in accepting many Ukrainian and Afghan migrants. There is also a need to move beyond the rhetoric of fear with regard to immigrants and to give them, according to the possibilities of the country, the concrete opportunity to become involved responsibly in society. For

this to happen, rights and democracy are indispensable. But it is also necessary to confront the individualistic mindset and to remember that life in common is based on presuppositions that the political system cannot produce on its own. Here too, the indigenous culture is of great help in recalling the importance of social values. The Catholic Church, with its universal dimension, its concern for the most vulnerable, its rightful service to human life at every moment of its existence, from conception to natural death, is happy to offer its specific contribution.

In these days, I have heard about the many needy persons who come knocking on the doors of the parishes. Even in a country as developed and prosperous as Canada, which pays great attention to social assistance, there are many homeless persons who turn to churches and food banks to receive essential help in meeting their needs, which, lest we forget, are not only material. These brothers and sisters of ours spur us to reflect on the urgent need for efforts to remedy the radical injustice that taints our world, in which the abundance of the gifts of creation is unequally distributed. It is scandalous that the well-being generated by economic development does not benefit all the sectors of society. And it is indeed sad that precisely among the native peoples we often find many indices of poverty, along with other negative indicators, such as the low percentage of schooling, and less than easy access to owning a home and to health care. May the emblem of the maple leaf, which regularly appears on the labels of the country's products, serve as an incentive to everyone to make economic and social decisions that foster participation and care for those in need.

It is by working in common accord, hand in hand, that today's pressing challenges must be faced. I thank you for your hospitality, attention and respect, and with great affection I assure you that Canada and its people are truly close to my heart.