

(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis is back in the Vatican after his 10th apostolic journey abroad which took him to Cuba, to the United States and to the United Nations in New York. During the flight that brought him back to Rome he spoke to journalists aboard the Papal plane, touching on many issues including his just concluded visit, the sex abuse scandal in the Church, the right to be a conscientious objector, a peace accord in Colombia, migration and the upcoming Synod on the Family.

**Pope Francis:**

Good evening to all and thank you for the work because you went about from one place to the other and I was in a car but you... thank you very much.

**Elizabeth Dias, Time Magazine:**

Thank you so much Holy Father Elizabeth Dias from TIME magazine. We are all so curious...this was your first visit to the US. What surprised you about the US and what was different to what you might have expected?

**Pope Francis:**

It was my first visit. I'd never been here before. What surprised me was the warmth, the warmth of the people, so lovable. It was a beautiful thing and also different: in Washington the welcome was warm but more formal; New York was a bit exuberant. Philadelphia very expressive. Three different kinds of welcome. I was very struck by this kindness and welcome but also by the religious ceremonies and also by the piety, the religiosity of the people... you could see the people pray and this struck me a lot. Beautiful.

**Elizabeth Dias, Time Magazine:**

Was there some sort of challenge that you didn't expect in the United States?

**Pope Francis:**

No, thank God no...everything was good. No challenge. No provocation. Everyone was polite. No insults and nothing bad.

**Elizabeth Dias, Time Magazine:**

Well, what is the challenge?

**Pope Francis:**

We must continue to work with the faithful like we have always done, until now. Accompanying people in their growth - through the good times but also through the difficult ones - accompanying people in their joy and in their bad moments, in their difficulties when there is no work, ill health. The challenge of the Church... now I

understand: the Church's challenge is staying close to the people. Close to the United States... not being a Church which is detached from the people but close to them, close, close and this is something that the Church in America has understood, and understood well.

**David O'Reilly, Philadelphia Inquirer:**

Holy Father: Philadelphia, as you know, has had a very difficult time with sex abuse. It's still an open wound in Philadelphia. So I know many people in Philadelphia were surprised that you offered bishops comfort and consolation and I think many in Philadelphia would ask you why did you feel the need to offer compassion to the bishops?

**Pope Francis:**

In Washington I spoke to all the US bishops... they were all there no? I felt the need to express compassion because something really terrible happened. And many of them suffered who did not know of this. I used words from the bible from Apocalypse: You are coming from a large tribulation. What happened was a great tribulation. But also the suffering (emotional). What I said today to the victims of abuse. I wouldn't say an apotheosis but almost a sacrilege. We know abuses are everywhere: in families, in neighborhoods, in schools, in gyms. But when a priest abuses it is very serious because the vocation of the priest is to make that boy, that girl, grow towards the love of God, toward maturity, and towards good. Instead this is squashed and this is nearly a sacrilege and he betrayed his vocation, the calling of the Lord. For this reason the Church is strong on this and one must not cover these things up. Those who covered this up are guilty. Even some bishops who covered this up, It is a terrible thing and the words of comfort were not to say: "Don't worry that was nothing... no, no, no even some bishops who covered this up, It's a terrible thing and the words of comfort were not to say "don't worry that was nothing...no, no , no, but it was so bad that I imagine that you cried hard"... that was the sense of what I meant and today I spoke strongly.

**Maria Antonietta Collins, Univision:**

You have spoken a lot about forgiveness, that God forgives us and that we often ask for forgiveness. I would like to ask you, after you were at the seminary today. There are many priests that have committed sexual abuses to minors and have not asked for forgiveness for their victims. Do you forgive them? And on the other hand, do you understand the victims or their relatives who can't or don't want to forgive?

**Pope Francis:**

If a person has done wrong, is conscious of what he has done and does not say sorry, I ask God to take him into account. I forgive him, but he does not receive that forgiveness,

he is closed to forgiveness. We must forgive, because we were all forgiven. It is another thing to receive that forgiveness. If that priest is closed to forgiveness, he won't receive it, because he locked the door from the inside. And what remains is to pray for the Lord to open that door. To forgive you must be willing. But not everyone can receive or know how to receive it, or are just not willing to receive it. What I'm saying is hard. And that is how you explain how there are people who finish their life hardened, badly, without receiving the tenderness of God.

**Maria Antonieta Collins, Univision:**

Regarding victims or relatives who don't forgive - do you understand them?

**Pope Francis:**

Yes, I do. I pray for them. And I don't judge them. Once, in one of these meetings, I met several people and I met a woman who told me "When my mother found out that I had been abused, she became blasphemous, she lost her faith and she died an atheist." I understand that woman. I understand here. And God who is even better than me, understands her. And I'm sure that that woman has been received by God. Because what was abused, destroyed, was her own flesh, the flesh of her daughter. I understand her. I don't judge someone who can't forgive. I pray and I ask God... God is a champion in finding paths of solutions. I ask him to fix it.

**Andres Beltramo, Notimex:**

Thanks, first of all for this moment. We've all heard you speak so much about the peace process in Colombia between the FARC and the government. Now, there's an historic agreement. Do you feel involved in this agreement and you've said that you wished to go to Colombia when this agreement was made, right? Now there are a lot of Colombians awaiting you.

**Pope Francis:**

When I heard the news that in March the accord will be signed I said to the Lord, 'Lord, help us reach March.' The willingness is there on both sides. It is there, even in the small group, everyone is in agreement. We have to reach March, for the definitive accord, which is the point of international justice. I was very happy and I felt like I was a part of it because I've always wanted this. I spoke to president Santos twice about this problem. Not only myself, but also the Holy See. The Holy See was always willing to help and do what it could.

**Thomas Jansen, CIC:**

Holy Father, I wanted to ask something about the migrant crisis in Europe. Many countries are building new barriers out of barbed wire. What do you think of this development?

**Pope Francis:**

You used a word, crisis. It's become a state of crisis after a long process. For years, this process has exploded because wars for which those people leave and flee are wars waged for years. Hunger. It's hunger for years. When I think of Africa... this is a bit simplistic. But I see it as an example. It comes to me to think about Africa, "the exploited continent." They went to pick up the slaves there, then its great resources. It's the exploited continent. And, now the wars, tribal or not. But they have economic interests behind them. And, I think that instead of exploiting a continent or a nation, make investments there instead so the people are able to work and this crisis would have been avoided. It's true, as I said at Congress, it's a refugee crisis not seen since World War II. It's the biggest. You asked me about barriers. You know what happens to all walls. All of them. All walls fall. Today, tomorrow or in 100 years, they will fall. It's not a solution. The Wall isn't a solution. In this moment, Europe is in difficulty, it's true. We have to be intelligent. We must find solutions. We must encourage dialogue between different nations, to find them. Walls are never solutions. But bridges are, always, always. I don't know. What I think is that walls can last a little time or a long time. The problem remains but it also remains with more hatred. That's what I think.

**Jean Marie Guenois, Le Figaro:**

Holy Father, you obviously cannot anticipate the debate of the synod fathers, we know that well. But we want to know just before the Synod, in your heart as a pastor, if you really want a solution for the divorced and remarried. We want to also know if your 'motu proprio' on the speeding-up of annulments has closed this debate. Finally, how do you respond to those who fear that with this reform, there is a de-facto creation of a so-called 'Catholic divorce.' Thank you.

**Pope Francis:**

I'll start with the last one. In the reform of the procedure and the way, I closed the door to the administrative path, which was the path through which divorce could have entered. You could say that those who think this is 'Catholic divorce' are wrong because this last document has closed the door to divorce by which it could have entered. It would have been easier with the administrative path. There will always be the judicial path. Continuing with the third (question): the document.... I don't remember the third but you correct me.

**Jean Marie Guenois, Le Figaro:**

The question was on the notion of Catholic divorce, if the *motu proprio* has closed the debate before the synod on this theme?

**Pope Francis:**

This was called for by the majority of the Synod fathers in the synod last year: streamline the process because there are cases that last 10-15 years, no? There's one sentence, then another sentence, and after there's an appeal, there's the appeal then another appeal. It never ends. The double sentence, when it was valid that there was an appeal, was introduced by Papa Lambertini, Benedict XIV, because in central Europe, I won't say which country, there were some abuses, and to stop it he introduced this but it's not something essential to the process. The procedure changes, jurisprudence changes, it gets better. At that time it was urgent to do this, then Pius X wanted to streamline and made some changes but he didn't have the time or the possibility to do it. The Synod fathers asked for it, the speeding up of the annulment processes. And I stop there. This document, this '*motu proprio*' facilitates the processes and the timing, but it is not divorce because marriage is indissoluble when it is a sacrament. And this the Church cannot change. It's doctrine. It's an indissoluble sacrament. The legal trial is to prove that what seemed to be a sacrament wasn't a sacrament, for lack of freedom for example, or for lack of maturity, or for mental illness. There are so many reasons that bring about (an annulment), after a study, an investigation. That there was no sacrament. For example, that the person wasn't free. Another example: now it's not so common but in some sectors of common society at least in Buenos Aires, there were weddings when the woman got pregnant: 'you have to get married.' In Buenos Aires, I counselled my priests, strongly, I almost prohibited them to celebrate weddings in these conditions. We called them "speedy weddings", eh? (They were) to cover up appearances. And the babies are born, and some work out but there's no freedom and then things go wrong little by little they separate (and say) 'I was forced to get married because we had to cover up this situation' and this is a reason for nullity. So many of them. Cases of nullity, you have, you can find them (the reasons) on the internet there all there are many, eh? Then, the issue of the second weddings, the divorcees, who make a new union. You read what, you have the "*instrumentum laboris*." what is put in discussion seems a bit simplistic to me to say that the Synod is the solution for these people and that they can have communion. That's not the only solution. No, what the "*Instrumentum laboris*" proposes is a lot more, and also the problem of the new unions of divorcees isn't the only problem. In the "*Instrumentum laboris*" there are many. For example, young people don't get married. They don't want to get married. It's a pastoral problem for the Church. Another problem: the affective maturity for a marriage. Another problem: faith. 'Do I believe that this is for ever? Yes, yes, yes, I believe.' 'But do you believe it?' the preparation for a wedding: I

think so often that to become a priest there's a preparation for 8 years, and then, its not definite, the Church can take the clerical state away from you. But, for something lifelong, they do four courses! 4 times... Something isn't right. It's something the Synod has to deal with: how to do preparation for marriage. It's one of the most difficult things. There are many problems, they're all are listed in the "Instrumentum laboris." But, I like that you asked the question about 'Catholic divorce.' That doesn't exist. Either it wasn't a marriage, and this is nullity -- it didn't exist. And if it did, it's indissoluble. This is clear. Thank you.

**Terry Moran, ABC News:**

Holy Father, thank you, thank you very much and thank you to the Vatican staff as well. Holy Father, you visited the Little Sisters of the Poor and we were told that you wanted to show your support for them and their case in the courts. And, Holy Father, do you also support those individuals, including government officials, who say they cannot in good conscience, their own personal conscience, abide by some laws or discharge their duties as government officials, for example in issuing marriage licenses to same sex couples. Do you support those kinds of claims of religious liberty?

**Pope Francis:**

I can't have in mind all cases that can exist about conscience objection. But, yes, I can say the conscientious objection is a right that is a part of every human right. It is a right. And if a person does not allow others to be a conscientious objector, he denies a right. Conscientious objection must enter into every juridical structure because it is a right, a human right. Otherwise we would end up in a situation where we select what is a right, saying 'this right that has merit, this one does not.' It (conscientious objection) is a human right. It always moved me when I read, and I read it many times, when I read the "Chanson de Roland" when the people were all in line and before them was the baptismal font and they had to choose between the baptismal font or the sword. They had to choose. They weren't permitted conscientious objection. It is a right and if we want to make peace we have to respect all rights.

**Terry Moran, ABC News:**

Would that include government officials as well?

**Pope Francis:**

It is a human right and if a government official is a human person, he has that right. It is a human right.

**Stefano Maria Paci, Sky News:**

Holiness, you used very strong words at the UN to denounce the world's silence on the persecution of Christians, who are deprived of their homes, thrown out, deprived of their possessions, enslaved and brutally killed. Yesterday, President Hollande announced the beginning of a bombing campaign by France on ISIS bases in Syria. What do you think of this military action? Also, the mayor of Rome, city of the Jubilee, declared that he came to the World Meeting of Families because you invited him. Can you tell us how it went?

**Pope Francis:**

I will start with your second question. I did not invite Mayor Marino. Is that clear? I didn't do it and I asked the organizers and they didn't invite him either. He came. He professes to be a Catholic and he came spontaneously. That's the first thing. But it is clear, heh? And now about bombardments. Truly, I heard the news the day before yesterday, and I haven't read about it. I don't know much about the situation. I heard that Russia took one position and it wasn't clear yet about the United States. I truly don't know what to say because I haven't fully understood the situation. But, when I hear the word bombing, death, blood... I repeat what I said in Congress and at the UN, to avoid these things. But, I don't know, I can't judge the political situation because I don't know enough about it.

**Miriam Schmidt, German DPA Agency:**

Holy Father, I wanted to ask a question about the relationship of the Holy See with China and the situation in this country which is also quite difficult for the Catholic Church. What do you think about this?

**Pope Francis:**

China is a great nation that offers the world a great culture, so many good things. I said once on the plane when we were flying over China when we were coming back from Korea that I would very much like so much to go to China. I love the Chinese people and I hope there is possibility of having good relations, good relations. We're in contact, we talk, we are moving forward but for me, having a friend of a great country like China, which has so much culture and has so much opportunity to do good, would be a joy.

**Maria Sagrarios Ruiz de Apodaca, RNE:**

Thank you. Good evening, Holy Father. You have visited the U.S. for the first time, you had never been there before. You spoke to Congress, you spoke to the United Nations. You drew multitudes. Do you feel more powerful? And another question, we heard you draw attention to the role of religious women, of the women in the Church in the United

States. Will we one day see women priests in the Catholic church as some groups in the U.S. ask, and some other Christian churches have?

**Pope Francis:**

He's telling me not to answer in Spanish (referring to Fr. Federico Lombardi.) The sisters in the United States have done marvels in the field of education, in the field of health. The people of the United States love the sisters. I don't know how much they love the priests, (laughs) but they love the sisters, they love them so much. They are great, they are great, great, great women. Then, one follows her congregation, their rules, there are differences. But are they great. And for that reason I felt the obligation to say thank you for what they have done. An important person of the government of the United States told me in the last few days: "The education I have, I owe above all to the sisters." The sisters have schools in all neighborhoods, rich and poor. They work with the poor and in the hospitals. This was the first. The second? The first I remember, the second?

**Maria Sagrarios Ruiz de Apodaca, RNE**

If you feel powerful after having been in the United States with your schedule and having been successful?

**Pope Francis:**

I don't know if I had success, no. But I am afraid of myself. Why am I afraid of myself? I feel always – I don't know – weak in the sense of not having power and also power is a fleeting thing, here today, gone tomorrow. It's important if you can do good with power. And Jesus defined power, the true power is to serve, to do service, to do the most humble services, and I must still make progress on this path of service because I feel that I don't do everything I should do. That's the sense I have of power.

Third, on women priests, that cannot be done. Pope St. John Paul II after long, long intense discussions, long reflection said so clearly. Not because women don't have the capacity. Look, in the Church women are more important than men, because the church is a woman. It is "la" church, not "il" church. The Church is the bride of Jesus Christ. And the Madonna is more important than popes and bishops and priests. I must admit we are a bit late in an elaboration of the theology of women. We have to move ahead with that theology. Yes, that's true.

**Mathilde Imberty, Radio France**

Holy Father, you have become a star in the United States. Is it good for the Church if the Pope is a star?

**Pope Francis:**

The Pope must... Do you know what the title was of the Pope that ought to be used? Servant of the servants of God. It's a little different from the stars. Stars are beautiful to look at. I like to look at them in the summer when the sky is clear. But the Pope must be, must be the servant of the servants of God. Yes, in the media this is happening but there's another truth. How many stars have we seen that go out and fall. It is a fleeting thing. On the other hand, being servant of the servants of God is something that doesn't pass.