



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 13 September

2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Apostolic Visit to Colombia

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

As you know, in recent days, I was on an [Apostolic Visit to Colombia](#). I thank the Lord with all my heart for this great gift and I wish to renew my gratitude to the [President of the Republic who welcomed me](#) with such courtesy, to the Bishops of Colombia who worked so hard to prepare for this visit, to all the other authorities of the country, and to all those who cooperated to make this visit possible. And a special thank-you to [the people of Colombia who welcomed me with so much affection and joy!](#) A joyful people amid so much suffering, but joyful; a people with hope. One of the things that struck me the most in all the cities amid the crowds, was the fathers and mothers with their children, who lifted the children up so that the Pope could bless them; but they were also showing off their children with pride, as if to say: “This boy is our pride! This girl is our hope”. I thought: a people capable of having children and showing them off with pride, as hope: this people has a future. And I liked this very much.

During this trip, I felt a special continuity with the two Popes who visited Colombia before me: [Blessed Paul vi in 1968](#) and [Saint John Paul ii in 1986](#); a continuity which has been strongly enlivened by the Spirit who guides the steps of the People of God along the paths of history.

The motto of this trip was “*Demos el primer paso*”, that is, “Let’s take the first step”, referring to the reconciliation process which Colombia is undergoing in order to come out of half a century of internal conflict which has spread suffering and hostility, resulting in many wounds that are difficult to heal. But with the help of God, the journey has already begun. With my visit, I wanted to bless the efforts of that people, confirm it in the faith and in hope and receive its testimony which is a wealth for my ministry and for the entire Church. The testimony of this people is a wealth for the entire Church.

Colombia — like the majority of Latin American countries — is a country with very strong Christian roots. And if this fact exacerbates the pain of the tragedy of the war which lacerated it, at the same it represents a guarantee of peace, the solid foundation of its reconstruction, the lifeblood of its

invincible hope. It is evident that the Evil One wanted to divide the people to destroy the work of God, but it is also evident that the love of Christ, his infinite Mercy, is stronger than sin and than death.

This journey's aim was to bring Christ's blessing, the blessing of the Church on the aspiration for life and peace which is overflowing from the heart of that nation. I could see it in the eyes of the *thousands and thousands of children and young people* who filled Bogotá Square, and whom I met everywhere; that life force which nature itself also proclaims with its exuberance and its biodiversity. Colombia is the second country in the world for its biodiversity. In Bogotá, I was able to meet all the Bishops of the country and also the Executive Committee of the Latin American Episcopal Conference. I thank God for the opportunity to embrace them and to give them my pastoral encouragement for their mission at the service of the Church, Sacrament of Christ, our peace and our hope.

The day which was specially dedicated to the theme of *reconciliation*, the culminating moment of the entire trip, took place in Villavicencio. In the morning there was a great Eucharistic celebration with the Beatification of the Martyrs Jesús Emilio Jaramillo Monsalve, a bishop, and Pedro María Ramírez Ramos, a priest; in the afternoon, a special Liturgy of Reconciliation, symbolically oriented towards the Christ of Bocayá, armless and legless, mutilated like his people.

The Beatification of the two Martyrs manifestly reminded us that peace is founded also, and maybe mostly, on the blood of many witnesses to love, truth and justice, and also on that of real Martyrs, killed for their faith, like the two just mentioned. Listening to their biographies was moving to the point of tears; tears of pain and joy together. Before their Relics and their faces, the holy People of God strongly felt its own identity, painfully, thinking about the many, too many victims, and with joy, for God's mercy is upon those who fear him (cf. Lk 1:50).

"Mercy and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Ps 85[84]:10), as we heard at the beginning. This verse from the Psalms contains the prophesy of what happened last Friday in Colombia: the prophesy and the grace of God for that wounded people so that it may rise again and walk in a new life. We saw these prophetic words filled with grace emanating from the stories of the witnesses who spoke on behalf of the many who, starting from their wounds, with the grace of Christ came out of themselves and opened themselves up to encounter, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In Medellín, the perspective was that of "*Christian life as discipleship*: vocation and mission". When Christians commit themselves entirely to the path of following Jesus Christ, they truly become salt, light and leaven in the world and yield abundant fruit. One result is the Hogares, that is, the Homes where children and young people wounded by life can find a new family where they are loved, welcomed, protected and followed. And other fruits, like abundant clusters, are the *vocations* to the priesthood and consecrated life, which I was able to bless and encourage with joy

in an unforgettable encounter with consecrated people and their families.

And finally in Cartagena, the city of Saint Peter Claver, the Apostle of the Slaves, the “focus” was on the *promotion of the human person and his or her fundamental rights*. Saint Peter Claver and, more recently, Saint Maria Bernarda Bütler gave their lives for the poorest and the most marginalized, and thus showed the path to real revolution, the evangelical one, not the ideological one, which truly sets people and societies free from the slavery of yesterday, and unfortunately, also of today. In this sense, “taking the first step” — the motto of the trip — means approaching, bending down, touching the flesh of the wounded and neglected brothers and sisters; and to do so with Christ, the Lord who became a slave for us. Thanks to him, there is hope because he is mercy and peace.

Once again, I entrust Colombia and its People to the Mother, Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, whom I was able to venerate in the Cathedral of Bogotá. With the help of Mary, may every Colombian *take the first step each day* towards their brother and sister, and thus build together, day by day, peace in love, in justice and in truth.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I offer a special greeting to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Tomorrow is the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Dear *young people*, strengthen your dialogue with God by spreading his light and his peace; dear *sick people*, find comfort in the Cross of the Lord Jesus who continues his work of salvation in the life of every man and woman; and you dear *newlyweds*, make an effort to maintain a constant relationship with the Crucified Christ so that your love may always be more true, fertile and lasting.