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Pope Francis in Kenya

The apostolic journey of the Holy Father Pope Francis to Africa were 5 intense days of celebration, dance and meetings with the faithful, religious, priests, youth, dignitaries and indeed followers of other faiths.

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Perhaps the centerpiece of his visit was to Uganda to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of those 22 Catholic martyrs of

Uganda. The Kenyan bishops, during their ad limina visit in April this year had taken the opportunity to invite the Holy Father to seemingly stopover in Kenya on his way to Uganda. The Pope accepted the invitation and added the Central African Republic to his itinerary and scheduled the entire trip for late November.

The three days that the Holy Father spent in Kenya were very intense. On Wednesday 25th he addressed the Diplomatic Corps where he thanked them for their warm welcome and expressed his great desire to meet with the youth. *“In these days, I look forward to meeting many of them, speaking with them, and encouraging their hopes and aspirations for the future. The young are any nation’s most valuable resource. To protect them, to invest in them and to offer them a helping hand, is the best way we can ensure a future worthy of the*

wisdom and spiritual values dear to their elders, values which are the very heart and soul of a people.” He then briefly remarked on the duty of the leaders of the country to “work with integrity and transparency for the common good, and to foster a spirit of solidarity at every level of society.”

Below we give short excerpts of subsequent speeches the Holy Father delivered to different gatherings.

Ecumenical and interreligious meeting.

Pope Francis said in this meeting:
Here I think of the importance of our common conviction that the God whom we seek to serve is a God of peace. His holy Name must never be used to justify hatred and violence. I know that the barbarous attacks on Westgate Mall, Garissa University College and Mandera are fresh in your minds. All too often, young people are being radicalized in the name of

religion to sow discord and fear, and to tear at the very fabric of our societies. How important it is that we be seen as prophets of peace, peacemakers who invite others to live in peace, harmony and mutual respect! May the Almighty touch the hearts of those who engage in this violence, and grant his peace to our families and communities.

Holy Mass in University of Nairobi Campus

In his homily the Holy Father defended the Africa's traditions: *Here, in the heart of this University, where the minds and hearts of new generations are being shaped, I appeal in a special way to the young people of the nation. Let the great values of Africa's traditions, the wisdom and truth of God's word, and the generous idealism of your youth guide you in working to shape a society which is ever more just, inclusive and*

respectful of human dignity. May you always be concerned for the needs of the poor, and reject everything that leads to prejudice and discrimination, for these things, we know, are not of God.

Visit to the U.N.O.N. (UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT NAIROBI)

On his way to the hall of the United Nations Office, Pope Francis was asked to plant a tree in the park of the United Nations Centre. The Holy Father was happy to carry out this simple symbolic act, which is so meaningful in many cultures.

In his address to the members of UNON said: *In a few days an important meeting on climate change will be held in Paris, where the international community as such will once again confront these issues. It would be sad, and I dare say even catastrophic, were particular interests to prevail over the common*

good and lead to manipulating information in order to protect their own plans and projects.

Visit to Kangemi Slum

Pope Francis remarked the main injustices that people suffer in the slums: *I would propose a renewed attention to the idea of a respectful urban integration, as opposed to elimination, paternalism, indifference or mere containment. We need integrated cities which belong to everyone. We need to go beyond the mere proclamation of rights which are not respected in practice, to implementing concrete and systematic initiatives capable of improving the overall living situation, and planning new urban developments of good quality for housing future generations. The social and environmental debt owed to the poor of cities can be paid by respecting their sacred right of the “three Ls”:*

Land, Lodging, Labour. This is not philanthropy; it is a moral duty upon all of us.

Pope's Off-the-Cuff Address to Kenyan Youth in Kasarani Stadium

After the intervention of two young people the Holy Father commented on their challenges as youth. He said:*Life is full of difficulties, but there are two ways of looking at difficulties: either a person looks at them as something that blocks him, destroys him, stops him, or he looks at them as an opportunity. It is for you to choose. For me, is a difficulty a way of destruction or it is an opportunity to surmount my whole situation, that of my family, of my communities, of my country? Boys and girls, we don't live in Heaven, we live on earth.*

One of the main problems in the last years in Kenya has been tribalism. Pope Francis said that is a real challenge: *Tribalism destroys a*

nation. Tribalism means to hide our hands behind us and to have a stone in each hand to throw it against the other. Tribalism is overcome only by listening with the heart and with the hand – with the ears. What is your culture? Why are you like this? Why does your tribe have this habit, this custom? Does your tribe feel superior or inferior? -- with the heart. Once I have heard the answer with the ears then I open my heart and stretch out my hand to continue the dialogue. If you don't dialogue and don't listen to one another, then there will always be tribalism as a woodworm that corrupts the society.

Another problem in Kenya is corruption and the Holy Father commented: Corruption is something that gets inside us. It's like sugar, we like it, it's easy and then we end badly, we come to an awful end. Because of so much sugar, we end up with diabetes or our country ends up being

sick with diabetes. Every time we accept money that is extorted, that we accept a small envelope and put it in our pocket, we destroy our heart, our personality, our homeland. Please, don't have a liking for this sugar, which is called corruption. "Father, but I see that everyone is corrupt. I see so many persons who sell themselves for a bit of money without being concerned about others' lives. As in all things, one must begin. If you don't want corruption in your heart, in your life, in your homeland, you must begin! If you don't begin, neither will your neighbour. Corruption, moreover, robs us of joy; it robs us of peace. A corrupt person doesn't live in peace.

Before he finished his commentary the Holy Father showed us what he keeps in his pocket. *I always keep two things in my pocket: a Rosary, to pray and something that seems strange ... what is it? It is the story of God's*

failure. It's a small Via Crucis. Just as Jesus suffered from the moment he was condemned to death to the moment he was buried. With these two things, I do my best. Thanks to these two things I don't lose hope.

A few hours after this encounter with the youth he left Nairobi and travelled to Kampala. We already miss his presence that lit up the streets and squares of Nairobi. Pope Francis has been a blessing from God and now we need to work to make these blessings bear fruit in our country, in our families and in ourselves.