

"Christians are called to be the leaven of fraternity"

In his May 3 general audience, Pope Francis spoke about his recent trip to Egypt and the apostolic fruit he hopes it will yield.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Today, I would like to talk to you about my Apostolic Journey to Egypt

which, with God's help, I undertook in recent days. I went to that country, taking up a four-fold invitation: from the President of the Republic, from His Holiness, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, from the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and from the Coptic Catholic Patriarch. I thank each of them for their truly warm welcome. And I thank all the people of Egypt for the participation and affection with which they experienced this visit by the Successor of Saint Peter.

The President and civil authorities took exceptional pains to ensure that this event could take place in the best possible way; so that it might be a sign of peace, a sign of peace for Egypt and for all that region, which, unfortunately, is afflicted by hostilities and terrorism. In fact, the trip's theme was: "*Pope of Peace in Egypt of Peace.*"

My visit to *Al-Azhar* University, the oldest Islamic university and the highest academic institution of Sunni Islam had a twofold aim: that of *dialogue* between Christians and Muslims and, at the same time, that of promoting *peace* in the world. At *Al-Azhar*, there was a meeting with the Grand Imam, a meeting that later extended to the International Peace Conference. In this context, I offered a reflection which recognized the history of the land of Egypt as *land of civilization* and *land of covenants*. For all of humanity, Egypt is synonymous with ancient civilization, art treasures and knowledge; and this reminds us that peace is built through education, the formation of knowledge, of a humanism which includes as integral parts the religious dimension, the relationship with God, as the Grand Imam recalled in his address. Peace is also built by beginning once again from the covenant between God and man,

the foundation of the covenant between all peoples based on the Ten Commandments written on the stone tablets at Sinai, but much more deeply in the heart of each man of every time and place, the law that is summarized in the two commandments of love of God and neighbour.

This same foundation is also at the basis of the building of social and civil order, in which all citizens, from every origin, culture and religion, are called to cooperate. Such a vision of healthy secularism emerged in the conversation with the President of the Republic of Egypt, in the presence of the country's authorities and Diplomatic Corps. Egypt's great historic and religious heritage and its role in the Middle Eastern region give it an unusual task in the journey toward stable and long-lasting peace that rests not on the law of force, but rather on the force of law.

Christians, in Egypt like in every nation on earth, are called to be the “leaven” of fraternity. This is possible if they live, within themselves, the Communion in Christ. Thanks to God, we were able to show a strong sign of communion with my dear Brother Pope Tawadros ii, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox. We renewed our commitment, also by signing a Common Declaration to journey together, and not to duplicate baptisms already received in the respective Churches. Together we prayed for the martyrs of the recent attacks that tragically struck that venerable Church; and their blood rendered fruitful that ecumenical encounter, in which Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch, my dear Brother, also participated.

The second day of the trip was dedicated to the Catholic faithful. The Holy Mass celebrated in the stadium

provided by Egyptian authorities was a celebration of faith and fraternity in which we felt the living presence of the Risen Christ. Commenting on the Gospel, I called on the small Catholic community in Egypt to relive the experience of the disciples of Emmaus: to always find in Christ, Word and Bread of Life, the joy of faith, the ardour of hope and the strength to bear loving witness that “we have encountered the Lord!”

I spent the last phase with priests, men and women religious and seminarians at the Major Seminary. There are many seminarians. This is a consolation! It was a Liturgy of the Word in which the vows of consecrated life were renewed. In this community of men and women who have chosen to offer their life to Christ for the Kingdom of God, I saw the beauty of the Church in Egypt and I prayed for all Christians in the Middle East, that, led by their pastors

and accompanied by the consecrated, they might become salt and light in those lands, in the midst of those peoples. For us, Egypt was a sign of hope, of refuge, of help. When that part of the world was starving, Jacob went there with his sons. Then, when Jesus was persecuted, he went there. For this reason, telling you about this trip means taking the path of hope. For us, Egypt is that sign of hope both for history and for the present time, of this fraternity which I wanted to tell you about.

I once again thank those who made this journey possible and all those who, in different ways, made their contribution, especially so many people who offered their prayers and their suffering. May the Holy Family of Nazareth, who migrated to the banks of the River Nile to flee from Herod's violence, bless and always protect the people of Egypt and guide

them to the path of prosperity, fraternity and peace.

Thank you!

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