

Pope Francis press conference on his way home



Main issues

1. Beginning with a question on the subject of sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy, the Pope revealed that he is to meet victims at the Vatican on June 6-7 and celebrate a Mass for them in St. Martha's guesthouse.

He also disclosed that, "at the moment, there are three bishops under investigation" and that "one has already been convicted, and the punishment needs to be decided."

"There will be no preferential treatment when it comes to child abuse," the Pope said, adding that, in Argentina, they call those who receive preferential treatment spoiled children. "There will be no 'spoiled children' in this case," he said. The Pope said "a zero-tolerance approach needs to be adopted with regard to this issue."

2. Questioned about the Church's approach to Communion for divorced-and-remarried Catholics, the Pope said the upcoming Synod of Bishops on Marriage and the Family will deal with more than just this issue, as the subject of the family is vast.

"What I didn't like was what some people, within the Church as well, said about the purpose of the synod: that it intends to allow remarried divorcees to take Communion, as if the entire issue boiled down to a case," he said.

He revealed that choosing the subject of the synod was a "powerful spiritual experience," as the discussion "turned slowly towards the family." He said he was "sure the Spirit of the Lord guided us to this point."

3. The Pope told reporters the "door is always open" to ending mandatory priestly celibacy, as it is not a dogma of the faith, but he appreciates it a "great deal" and believes it is "a gift for the Church."

4. Asked about future trips, the Pope revealed that, as well as his visit to South Korea in August, he will make a two-day trip to Sri Lanka and the Philippines next January, to the area affected by Super-Typhoon Haiyan.

5. Acknowledging that religious freedom is lacking not only in Asia, but further afield, he said "we

need to approach certain places carefully, to go and help them, pray a lot for these Churches that are suffering ... but it's not an easy task." He said he felt there were "more martyrs now than the early Church had seen."

6. Turning to recent European Parliament elections, the Pope said he did not know much about the subject and was, in any case, preoccupied with the Holy Land visit. But he regretted low birth rates in Europe, citing Italy and Spain in particular. He spoke of how the young and the old are "discarded" and decried high unemployment rates on the continent. "It is an inhumane economic system," he said, which is "centered on money, not the human person."

7. Asked if he would ever consider resigning as pope, he said he would "do what the Lord tells me to do" and "pray and try to follow God's will." Benedict XVI opened the door to the possibility, he said, but "whether there will be others, only God knows."

"I believe that if a bishop of Rome feels he is losing his strength, he must ask himself the same questions Pope Benedict XVI did," Francis said.

8. On allegations of financial misconduct at the Vatican, the Pope said an investigation into possible embezzlement of 15 million euros from the IOR (Institute for the Works of Religion, informally known as the Vatican Bank) "is still being looked into." According to Vatican Information Service, the Pope said, "The Secretariat for the Economy will help prevent scandals and problems. For instance, in the IOR I think that around 1,600 accounts have been closed, belonging to people who were not entitled to hold an account at the IOR. The IOR exists to help the Church, and accounts can be held by bishops, Vatican employees, and their widows or widowers, to draw their pensions. ... But other private individuals are not entitled to accounts. It is not open to all."

9. Regarding reform of the Vatican and Roman Curia as a whole, the Pope said: "The path of persuasion is very important. There are some people who don't understand. But I am happy; we have worked hard."

10. Responding to a question about Catholic-Orthodox relations, Francis said the different date of Easter in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches is a "bit ridiculous," and he discussed resolving that with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in Jerusalem. He stressed that unity "comes along a path" and is a journey; it could never be created "at a theological congress."

11. Spontaneous Invitation: Reflecting on his trip to the Holy Land, the Pope said his invitation to the Palestinian and Israeli presidents, Mahmoud Abbas and Shimon Peres, to pray at the Vatican was spontaneous. They had wanted to have it during the visit, but, logistically, that wasn't possible. "The purpose of the meeting will be to pray, not meditate," he said.

12. On the future of Jerusalem, the Pope said issues must be resolved "in a spirit of fraternity and mutual trust, following the path of negotiation." He said courage is needed, and he prayed that "these two presidents have the courage to go on." Jerusalem, he said, "should be the city of peace of the three religions."

Edward Pentin is the Register's Rome correspondent.

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