

Pope prays for grace to cry at concentration camp



The Pope will visit

Auschwitz-Birkenau during his trip to Poland for World Youth Day

Pope prays for grace to cry at concentration camp where nearly a million Jews died

Pope Francis has cancelled his planned speech and asked for silence during his visit to a concentration camp in Poland next month.

Speaking to reporters on the flight back from Armenia on Sunday, the Pope recalled his 2014 visit to Redipuglia in northern Italy to mark the 100th anniversary of World War I. "I went in silence," he said, walking alone among the graves.

Speaking about his planned visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 1.1 million people were killed by Nazis during the Second World War, he said: "I would like to go to that place of horror without speeches, without crowds - only the few people necessary," he said. "Alone, enter, pray. And may the Lord give me the grace to cry."

Fr Federico Lombardi, the Vatican's press spokesman, confirmed today that the official programme had been changed and the Pope would not give a speech at the death camp, reminding reporters that it was not that Francis had nothing to say about the horror of the Holocaust, the importance of remembering it or the need to continue fighting anti-Semitism.

Pope Francis visited the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem in Israel in 2014 and laid a wreath of

flowers in memory of the 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis. He met six survivors of Nazi camps, kissing their hands in a sign of deference and recognition of their suffering.

Protocol for the occasion required a speech and, led to the podium, Pope Francis spoke softly, reflecting on the question of "Where was man?" and how could human beings have sunk so horribly low.

In his speech, he prayed: "Grant us the grace to be ashamed of what we men have done, to be ashamed of this massive idolatry, of having despised and destroyed our own flesh which you formed from the earth, to which you gave life with your own breath of life. Never again, Lord, never again!"

"Here we are, Lord, shamed by what man, created in your own image and likeness, was capable of doing," he said. "Remember us in your mercy."

After finishing the speech, the Pope stood in silence at the lectern for almost three minutes. Writing in the Yad Vashem guestbook, he said: "With shame for what man, who was created in the image of God, was able to do; with shame for the fact that man made himself the owner of evil; with shame that man made himself into god and sacrificed his brothers. Never again! Never again!"

The Pope will be in Poland from 27-31 July for World Youth Day – the gathering of thousands of Catholic young people from around the world. He is due to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp on 29 July.

The Vatican's schedule for the Pope's visit to the concentration camp originally had him giving a speech at the international monument at Birkenau, just as St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI did.

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