

Pope on plane: No to a 'throw-away' culture

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 22, 2013 NCR Today
World Youth Day 2013
Aboard the papal plane

Aboard the papal plane en route to Brazil today, Pope Francis told the roughly 70 reporters traveling with him from Rome to Rio de Janeiro that [he wants World Youth Day to include a greater focus on the elderly](#) [1], too, fighting a "throw-away" culture that often neglects people at both ends of life.

Francis did not hold a press conference, saying bluntly, "I don't give interviews." He spoke without notes for about five minutes to reporters aboard the plane. The pope then stood at the front of the economy compartment on the plane for almost an hour, greeting each journalist one by one.

Prior to the pope's brief remarks, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, had asked a veteran Mexican television correspondent to say a few words to the pope in his native Spanish on behalf of the press corps.

Valentina Alazraki Crastich of Televisa told Francis that reporters often aren't saints, at least of the religious sort, and can sometimes be like lions. She presented Francis with an icon of the Madonna of Guadalupe, traditionally venerated at the patroness of Latin America.

The following is an *NCR* transcript of the pope's remarks, which took place roughly two hours after take-off at 8:45 a.m. Rome time. Francis spoke in Italian; the following is a rush *NCR* translation.

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Good morning, good morning to all of you ... [referring to the greeting by Alazraki]: I have to say, I heard things that are a little strange ... that you're not saints, of my devotion, and that I'm here among the lions. Thanks very much.

I don't give interviews. Why, I don't know, but I can't. It's a little difficult for me, but I'm grateful for your company.

This first trip is to reach out to young people, not in isolation but rather within the larger fabric of society. When we isolate them, we do them an injustice because young people already belong in several ways ... they belong to a family, a country, a culture and a faith. We must not isolate them, and above all, we shouldn't isolate them within the whole of the society.

It's true, of course, that youth are the future of a people. They're the future because they have the strength, as young people, to move forward. But those at the other extremity of life, the elderly, are also the future of a people. A people has a future if it moves forward with both these ends -- young people with their strength to go forward and the elderly because they're the ones who offer us the wisdom of life.

Many times, I think we do an injustice to the elderly by setting them aside, as if they don't have anything to give us. But they can give us the wisdom of life, the wisdom of the past, the wisdom of our country and our family. We need this. So, I'm going [to Brazil] to meet the youth, yes, but within their social fabric, principally with the elderly.

The global [economic] crisis is taking its toll on young people. I read last week about the percentage of young people who are unemployed. Just think, we're running the risk of having a whole generation without work. A person draws dignity from work, the ability to earn one's bread.

Young people at the moment are in crisis. We've become a little accustomed to a throw-away culture, and with the elderly and we do it far too much. With all these young people out of work, the throw-away culture is reaching them too. We must get rid of this throw-away mentality. We need a culture of inclusion, of encounter, a culture with the strength to bring everyone along in society. That's more or less the meaning I want to give to this visit to the young ... [to understand] youth within the larger society.

I thank everyone and ask you to help me to work on this trip for the good, for the good of society and young people and the elderly, both together without being forgotten.

Thanks to the saints who aren't of my devotion, to the lions who weren't so ferocious! Thanks, thanks much, and a hug for everyone.

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