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Pope confirms trip to Holy Land in May

Joshua J. McElwee | Jan. 5, 2014 NCR Today

Pope Francis confirmed on Sunday that he will be visiting the Holy Land in May, asking the crowd at the weekly Angelus address in St. Peter's Square to pray for the success of the pilgrimage.

News reports had speculated for months that Francis would be making such a trip this year, but the Vatican had been yet to confirm [1]. Francis said Sunday [2] he would be traveling May 24-26.

The relative shortness of the trip may underline the sensitives of a papal visit to the area, where the pope will likely meet with both Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

Earlier reports from Israeli newspapers, citing from a preliminary itinerary of the trip, had the pope arriving in Jordan on Saturday, May 24, traveling to Israel on Sunday morning, then celebrating Mass in Bethlehem on Monday before heading back to Rome.

Francis visit comes in the year of the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's visit to the area, the first visit of a pope to the Holy Land and the first time a pontiff had left Italy in over a century.

While there, Paul met with the Orthodox Christian leader the patriarch of Constantinople, who is traditionally known as the successor of the apostle St. Andrew. Their meeting was seen as leading to a new opening between Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, which cut formal ties with each other beginning in the year 1054.

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