



## **Pope Francis visits troubled Mexico**

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Mexican Catholics are rejoicing as Pope Francis' I began his visit to the country. The head of the Catholic Church intends to provide a message of peace to the Mexican population. Implied by his chosen destinations and his declaration, "I'm going to Mexico as a pilgrim, with an open heart to seek the richness of faith",<sup>1</sup> the visit is being propelled by a missionary outlook. Furthermore, the Pope said in a video transmitted by *Télam*, the Argentinian national news agency, that he does not intend to cover up or shy away from discussing Mexico's repressive reality.

**"The Mexico of violence, the Mexico of corruption, the Mexico of drug trafficking, the Mexico of cartels, is not the Mexico that our Mother [the Virgin Mary] wants, and of course I will not do anything to cover that up. On the contrary, I will encourage them to the fight every day against corruption, drug trafficking, war, discord, organized crime and human trafficking."<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the authors.

"...llegare a Mexico como un peregrino, con el corazon abierto a buscar la riqueza de la fe.."From <sup>1</sup> Francisco: "Llegaré a México Como un Peregrino, Con el Corazon Abierto a Buscar la Riqueza de la Fe". No date. Taken from *Télam* website. Availabe at < <http://www.telam.com.ar/multimedia/video/12550-francisco-llegare-a-mexico-como-un-peregrino-con-el-corazon-abierto-a-buscar-la-riqueza-de-la-fe/> > (last accesed on 02/12/2016)

<sup>2</sup> Translated by the authors. "...el Mexico de la violencia, el Mexico de la corrupcion, el Mexico del trafico, de drogas, el Mexico de los cartels, no es el Mexico que quiere nuestra madre, y por supuesto que yo no quiero tapar nada de eso. Al contrario, exhortarlos a la lucha de todos los dias contra la corrupcion, contra el trafico, contra la Guerra, contra la desunion, contra el crimen organizado, contra la trata de personas". From <sup>2</sup> Francisco: "Llegaré a México Como un Peregrino, Con el Corazon Abierto a Buscar la Riqueza de la Fe". No date. Taken from *Télam* website. Availabe at < <http://www.telam.com.ar/multimedia/video/12550-francisco-llegare-a-mexico-como-un-peregrino-con-el-corazon-abierto-a-buscar-la-riqueza-de-la-fe/> > (last accesed on 02/12/2016)

For his six-day visit, Pope Francis' agenda includes visiting cities usurped by high levels of violence, inequality, and poverty such as Ecatepec, San Cristobal, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Morelia, and Ciudad Juarez. These are cities that have not been visited by either of his predecessor, St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict<sup>1</sup>. The Pontiff is expected to focus on issues of violence, particularly those perpetrated against women, as well as human rights, organized crime, and extreme poverty. During this visit, he is also expected to address on issues of immigration centered on the mistreatment of Central American migrants and the suffering being faced by migrants at Mexico's northern border<sup>2</sup>. He already has repeatedly spoken of the issue of corruption and violence during his first remarks at the National Palace in Mexico City:

**“Experience shows us that whenever we seek the path of privilege or the benefit of a few to the detriment of the common good, sooner or later life in society becomes a fertile ground for corruption, drug trafficking, exclusion of different cultures, violence and even human trafficking, kidnapping and death, causing suffering and hampering development.”<sup>3</sup>**

On Sunday's mass at Ecatepec, he encouraged more than 300,000 attendees to make Mexico a land of fulfilled opportunities stating:

**“...where migration is not necessary in order to dream, where one does not need to be exploited at work, where there is no need to make the despair and poverty of many the opportunism of a few. A land that does not have to mourn men and women, young people and children who end up destroyed at the hands of the traffickers of death”<sup>4</sup>**

The Pope's decision to visit Mexico is in part due to the current frightful levels of violence and lawlessness that the country is experiencing. Mexico's widely criticized human rights abuses, such as the ominous disappearance of the 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014, is one of the grim issues on his agenda.



## **Sexual Abuse, Corruption, and Violence**

Although the Pope intends to make his visit one of a missionary pilgrimage, national and international spectators expect him, as self-proclaimed activist, to address the nationwide sense of outrage over the current status quo in the country as well as matters of faith. The most contentious issues are ones within the highest rank of the Catholic Church in Mexico and its relationship with the Mexican president. On February 6, popular news journalist Adela Aristegui and her team released a report questioning the validity of President Peña Nieto's marriage to Mexican actress Angelica Rivera. The report reveals "irregularities" in the annulment of Ms. Rivera's previous marriage to Jose Alberto Castro, implicating highly-placed Vatican and Mexican government officials.<sup>5</sup> This controversy only adds to the decline of the presidential family's reputation and the legitimacy of the Catholic Church in the country. The public wonders if the Pope will address this scandal, even though it could be eclipsed by the most important issue affecting the legitimacy of the Church in Mexico: the many cases of sexual abuses by the Mexican clergy. The public overwhelmingly wants Pope Francis to fully acknowledge the wrongdoings of the church, starting with the case of Marcial Maciel, a priest who is usually known for abusing dozens of minors for decades. They are also concerned with more recent cases and equally notorious, such as priests from Oaxaca and San Luis Potosi, who are accused of perpetrating sexual crimes against indigenous children and running from the law under charges of sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup> However, according to a new manual of the Vatican for newly ordained bishops, prelates are not responsible for reporting allegations of minor sexual abuse to police authorities. The manual stipulates that only the families of the victims can decide to report cases to pertinent authorities.<sup>7</sup> Although the general public



wants the Pope to touch on this issue, it is unknown what his response will be; so far he has not addressed the controversy.

Another issue that Mexicans expect to occupy a slot in the Pope's agenda is the assassination of Father Gregorio Gorostieta in the state of Guerrero in December 2014. Father Gregorio, better known as "Goyo", was very outspoken against the drug trafficking organization "Guerreros Unidos" and had publicly accused them for the kidnapping of the 43 students in Ayotzinapa. Father "Goyo" had also condemned state and police officials' participation in the disappearance of the students.<sup>8</sup> If Pope Francis publically addresses this murder in defense to the Catholic Church, Mexicans expect the Peña Nieto's administration to take action on the issue.

Furthermore, just a day before Pope Francis' visit to Mexico, a riot in Topo Chico's jail in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, one of Mexico's largest cities, left dozens of inmates dead. This is one the deadliest incident of its kind in Mexico's modern history. Questions regarding the miserable management of jails in the state of Nuevo Leon were immediately raised, and Mexico's Human Rights Commission (CNDH) has already announced an investigation<sup>9</sup>. This event undoubtedly adds to the list of hideous atrocities that the Pope could potentially acknowledge during his visit.

Despite the fact that 80 percent of the Mexican population identifies as Catholic, some are not all that delighted about the Pope's visit. They expressed their anger over the alleged \$100 million pesos that the Mexican government and donors have spent in preparations for his coming. Over the past few days, manifestations of discontent have been evident on social media. Hashtags have been circulating on Twitter such as *#yonoquieroquevengaelpapa*, ("I do not want the Pope to come"), *#yoodioalpapa* (I hate the Pope), and *#yorepudioalpapa* (I repudiate the Pope).



Without a doubt, the Pope's historic visit to a deeply troubled Mexico raises profound expectations and intrigue at the same time. Catholic Mexicans hope that the Pope advocates for justice and change, whereas many others oppose the government's intrusive attitude and spending in response to the visit. It will be interesting to see the interaction between the Pontiff and unpopular President Peña Nieto and the impact the former's visit will have on the future policy making by Mexican authorities. Pope Francis has already made clear statements about the relation between violence and corruption; if Peña Nieto can tackle the Pope's reforms, he can reshape the future of Church-State relations in Mexico. Now it is time for the Peña Nieto administration to react to the Pontiff's declarations. Will we see a repentant Mexico?

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<sup>1</sup> "Catholic News Service." *Vatican Updates Papal Itinerary for Cuba, Mexico Visit*. 8 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/vatican-updates-papal-itinerary-for-cuba-mexico-visit.cfm>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Grillo, Ioan. "Pope Francis's Visit to Mexico Highlights the Church's Drug War Woes." *Time*. Time, 11 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://time.com/4216331/pope-francis-mexico-visit-cartel-drug-war/>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Discurso Completo Del Papa Francisco En Palacio Nacional." *Animal Político*. 13 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2016/02/discurso-completo-del-papa-francisco-en-palacio-nacional/>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> "La Homilia del Papa en Ecatepec" February 14<sup>th</sup> 2016. Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/videos/spanish/2016/02/14/cnnee-francisco-en-mexico-homilia-ecatepec.cnn> (Last accessed on 02/14/2016)

<sup>5</sup> "El Expediente Secreto De La Boda Peña Nieto-Rivera." - *Aristegui Noticias*. 6 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://aristeguinoticias.com/0602/mexico/el-expediente-secreto-de-la-boda-pena-nieto-rivera/>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Fernandez, Rafael. "Will Pope Francis Confront the 'devil' in the Mexican Church?" *Fusion*. 9 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://fusion.net/story/265313/will-pope-francis-confront-the-devil-in-the-mexican-church/>.

Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.



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<sup>7</sup> "Según El Vaticano, Los Obispos "no Están Obligados" a Denunciar Los Abusos a Menores." La Nacion. 11 Feb. 2016. Available at: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1870341-segun-el-vaticano-los-obispos-no-estan-obligados-a-denunciar-los-abusos-a-menores>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Goodson, Nelson. "Father Gregorio "Goyo" Gorostieta Was Fatally Shot In The Head." Hispanic News Network USA Blog. 27 Dec. 2014. Available at: <https://hngwiusa.wordpress.com/2014/12/27/father-gregorio-goyo-gorostieta-was-fatally-shot-in-the-head/>. Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

<sup>9</sup> "Prison Riot Leaves Dozens Dead, Political Turmoil in Mexico." Latin News. Available at: [http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=68092&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat\\_id=800806](http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=68092&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat_id=800806). Last accessed on 16 Feb. 2016.

