

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CANADA

*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis
Meeting with the Young and with Elderly People
Iqaluit, 29 July 2022*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good evening!

I greet the Governor General, and all of you, most heartily. I am happy to be here with you. I thank you for your words of welcome, and for your songs, dances and music, which I enjoyed greatly!

A short while ago, I listened to several of you, who were students of residential schools. I thank you for having had the courage to tell your stories and to share your great suffering. This only renewed in me the indignation and shame that I have felt for months. Today too, in this place, I want to tell you how very sorry I am and to ask for forgiveness for the evil perpetrated by not a few Catholics who contributed to the policies of cultural assimilation and enfranchisement in those schools. I was reminded of the testimony of an elder, who spoke of the beautiful spirit that reigned in indigenous families before the advent of the residential school system. He compared those days, when grandparents, parents and children were harmoniously together, to springtime, when young birds chirp happily around their mother. But suddenly – he said – the singing stopped: families were broken up, and the little ones were taken away far from home. Winter fell over everything.

Stories like these not only cause us pain; they also create scandal. All the more so, if we compare them with the word of God and its commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (*Ex 20:12*). That possibility did not exist for many of your families; it vanished when children were separated from their parents and their own nation was perceived as dangerous and foreign. Those forced assimilations evoke another biblical story, that of the just man Naboth (*cf. 1 Kings 21*), who refused to give the vineyard he had inherited from his ancestors to those in power, who were willing to use every means to snatch it from him. And we think too of the forceful words of Jesus about those who scandalize or despise even one of the little ones (*cf. Mt 18:6, 10*). How evil it is to break the bonds uniting parents and children, to damage our closest relationships, to harm and scandalize the little ones!

Dear friends, we are here with the desire to pursue together a journey of healing and reconciliation that, with the help of the Creator, can help us shed light on what happened and move beyond that dark past. As a way of dispelling that darkness, now too, as in our meeting at the end of March, you have lit the *qulliq*. Not only did the *qulliq* give light amid the long winter nights, it also relieved the harshness of the weather by spreading heat. In this way, it was essential for living. Even today, this lamp remains a beautiful symbol of life, of a luminous way of living that does not yield to the darkness of the night. That is what you are, a perennial

testimony to the life that never ends, a light that shines and that no one has been able to extinguish.

I am grateful for this opportunity to be here in Nunavut, within Inuit Nunangat. I tried to imagine, after our meeting in Rome, these vast places that you have inhabited from time immemorial and that others would consider inhospitable. You have come to love these places, to respect, cherish and enhance them, passing on, from generation to generation, such basic values as respect for the elderly, genuine fraternity and care for the environment. There is a beautiful relationship between you and this land you inhabit, because it too is strong and resilient, and responds with brilliant light to the darkness that enshrouds it for most of the year. Yet this land, like every individual and every people, is also fragile, and needs to be cared for. Caring, teaching and learning how to care: to this task young people in particular, supported by the example of their elders, have been called! Care for the earth, care for your people, care for your history.

I would like now to address you, Inuit youth, the future of this land and the present of its history. I would like to say to you, in the words of a great poet: “That which you inherited from your fathers, must first be earned before it can become yours” (GOETHE, *Faust*, I, Nacht). It is not enough to live off the past, it is necessary to earn what was given to you as a gift. Do not be afraid, then, to continue listening to the counsels of the elderly, to embrace your past in order to write new pages of history, to be passionate, to take a stand before facts and people, to get involved! To help you make the lamp of your lives shine brightly, I too, as an elder brother, would also like to offer you three pieces of advice.

The first is: *Keep walking upwards*. You live in these vast regions of the north. May they remind you of your vocation to strive ever higher, without letting yourself get dragged down by those who would have you believe that it is better to think only of yourself and to use your time solely for your leisure and your interests. Friends, you were not made “to get by”, to spend your days balancing duties and pleasures, but to soar upwards, towards the most genuine, true and beautiful desires that you cherish in your hearts, to love God and to serve your neighbour. Don’t think that life’s great dreams are as unattainable as the sky above. You were made to fly, to embrace the courage of truth and the beauty of justice, to “elevate your moral temper, to be compassionate, to serve others and to build relationships” (cf. *Inunnguiniq Iq Principles* 3-4). To sow seeds of peace and loving care wherever you are; to ignite the enthusiasm of those all around you; to keep pressing forward and not to flatten everything out.

But – you might say – to live like that is harder than flying! Certainly, it is not easy, because there is a kind of hidden “force of spiritual gravity” that tries to drag us down, kill our desires, and lessen our joy. Keep thinking of the arctic swallow that in Spanish we call a “charrán”. It does not let head winds or sudden changes in temperature stop it from flying from one end of the earth to the other. At times, it chooses alternate routes, accepts detours, adapts to certain winds..., but it always has a clear goal and it always arrives at its destination. You will meet people who will try to discount your dreams, who will tell you to settle for less, to fight only for what is in your interest. Then you will have to ask yourself: Why do

I need to go out of my way for what other people do not believe in? Or again: How can I “soar” in a world that seems constantly to be dragged down by scandals, wars, fraud, injustice, environmental destruction, indifference towards those in need, disillusionment from those who should be giving an example? Faced with these questions, what is the answer?

Here is what I would tell you: you are the answer! You, my brother, and you, my sister. Not just because once you give up, you have already lost, but because the future is even now in your hands. The community that gave you birth, the environment in which you live, the hopes of your peers, of those who, without even asking, expect from you the irreplaceable treasure that you can bring to history: all these things are in your hands, because “each one of us is unique” (cf. *Principle 5*). The world you are living in is the treasure you have inherited: love it, even as God, who gave you life and its great joys, loved you and created all this great beauty for you. God never ceases to have confidence in you, not for a second. He believes in your talents. When you seek him, you will come to realize how the path he calls you to follow always goes upwards. You will realize this when you look up at the sky as you pray, and especially when you contemplate him on the cross. You will come to realize that Jesus, from the cross, never points his finger at you; he embraces you and encourages you, because he believes in you even at those times when you stop believing in yourself. So never lose hope, fight, give it your all, and you will not be sorry. Go forward on your journey, “step by step towards the best” (cf. *Principle 6*). Set the navigator of your lives on a great destination: upwards!

The second piece of advice is: *Come to the light*. When you feel sad or downcast, think of the *qulliq*: it has a message for you. What message? That you are meant to come into the light each day. Not just on the day of your birth, when it did not depend on you, but every day. Each day you are called to bring new light into the world, the light of your eyes, the light of your smile, the light of the goodness that you and you alone can bring. Yet, to come into the light, to be reborn, you need to fight each day against the darkness. For there is a daily clash between light and darkness, which does not take place somewhere out there, but within each of us. To follow the way of light requires courageous and heartfelt decisions to resist the darkness of lies. It means “developing good habits to live well” (cf. *Principle 1*), not to chase bursts of light that disappear quickly, fireworks that leave only smoke in their wake. These are “illusions, parodies of happiness”, as Saint John Paul II said here in Canada: “There is perhaps no darkness deeper than the darkness that enters young people’s souls when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith and hope and love” (*Homily for World Youth Day, Toronto, 28 July 2002*). Dear brother, dear sister, Jesus is close to you and he wants to light up your heart, to make you come to the light. He said of himself: “I am the light of the world” (*Jn 8:12*), but he also told his disciples: “You are the light of the world” (*Mt 5:14*). You too, then, are light for the world and you will shine all the brighter if you struggle to cast out the dark shadows of evil from your heart.

To do this, there is a skill that we have to acquire, one that calls for “overcoming difficulties and contradictions through a continuous search for solutions” (see *Principle 2*). It is the art of daily separating light from darkness. To

create a good world, the Bible tells us, God began just like that, by separating the light from the darkness (cf. *Gen 1:4*). We too, if we want to become better, must learn to distinguish light from darkness. Where do we start? You can start by asking yourself: what are the things that first strike me as glittery and seductive, but then leave me with a feeling of deep emptiness? That is the darkness! What, on the other hand, is good for me and leaves a feeling of peace in my heart, even if it first calls me to give up certain conveniences and to master certain instincts? That is the light! And – I ask again – what is the power that enables us to separate the light from the darkness within us, that enables us to say “no” to the temptations of evil and “yes” to all that is good? It is *freedom*. Freedom does not mean doing everything I want and acting as I please. Freedom is not about what I can do in spite of others, but what I can do *for* others. Freedom is not total caprice, but responsibility. Freedom, along with life, is the greatest gift that our heavenly Father has given us. A poet, wondering what is the greatest satisfaction a son can give to a father, wrote some beautiful words that I would like to read to you:

“Ask this father whether the best time
is not when his children begin to love him as men do, and himself as a man,
freely [...].

Now, I am their father, says God, and I know the human condition. [...]

All the acts of submission in the world repel me,

and I would give everything for a beautiful gaze of a free man [...].

For this freedom, this gratuitousness, I have sacrificed everything, says God...

To create this freedom, this gratuitousness,

To bring about this freedom, this gratuitousness”

(C. PÉGUY, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*).

Here is what makes God happy: not when we submit to him, but when we live as children who choose to love him, staking their own freedom on this choice. If you want to make God happy, this is the way: choose goodness! Be strong, brothers and sisters! Hold on to your freedom! Do not be afraid to make hard choices! Come to the light each day!

Finally, the third piece of advice: *Be part of a team*. Young people do great things together, not alone. You young people are like the stars in the sky, which shine so marvellously in this land. Their beauty comes from the whole, from the constellations they make up, which give light and provide bearings in the nights of this world. You too, called to the heights of heaven and to shine here on earth, are made to shine together, in unison. Young people have to be allowed to congregate, to be on the move: they can't spend their days in isolation, hostage to a cell phone! The great glaciers in these lands make me think of Canada's national sport, ice hockey. How does Canada manage to win all those Olympic medals? How did Sarah Nurse or Marie-Philip Poulin get to score all those goals? Hockey combines discipline and creativity, tactics and physical strength; but team spirit always makes the difference; it is essential for responding to the unpredictability of every game. Teamwork means believing that, in order to achieve great goals, you cannot go it alone; you have to move together, to have the patience to practise and carry out complicated plays. Teamwork also involves making room for others, dashing

out quickly when it is your turn and cheering on your teammates. That is team spirit!

Friends, keep walking upwards, come to the light each day, and be part of a team! Do all this within your own culture and in the beautiful Inuktut language. It is my hope and prayer that, by listening to your elders and drawing from the richness of your traditions and your personal freedom, you will embrace the Gospel preserved and handed down by your ancestors, and thus come to see the Inuk face of Jesus Christ. I bless you from my heart, and to all of you I say: *qujannamiik!* [Thank you!]