News



Pope Francis boards the plane Jan. 23, 2019, at Fiumicino Airport in Rome for his visit to Panama for World Youth Day. (CNS/Reuters/Remo Casilli)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Aboard the papal flight to Panama — January 23, 2019

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Pope Francis framed panic over the arrival of migrants as irrational Jan. 23 as he was headed to Central America for a five-day visit and as a second migrant caravan is headed to the U.S.-Mexico border.

In a conversation with a journalist aboard the flight who had recently visited the border wall north of Tijuana, Mexico, the pontiff said unease of migrants is borne of a "fear that drives us crazy."

Francis is visiting Panama Jan. 23-27 for the triennial celebration of World Youth Day.

The pope's brief remarks were part of a series of short one-on-one conversations he had with journalists on his plane, in a traditional meet-and-greet just after the flight took off from Rome.

He did not expand on the issue of migration but is expected to speak more on the subject, his first return to Latin America since his visit a year ago to Chile and Peru.

Francis also confirmed in a separate conversation that he will be visiting Japan later in the year, telling a Japanese journalist aboard the flight: "I will go to Japan in November. Get ready."

Although the pope had previously announced his intention to visit Japan in 2019, the Vatican has yet to announce the date of the voyage.

Some of the individual encounters with Francis were humorous. Told by an American journalist that the person prays for the pope everyday, the pope asked: "For or against?"

"For!" the journalist replied.

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