News



Pope Francis makes the shape of a heart as he visits Casa Hogar el Buen Samaritano (Good Samaritan Home) in Panama City Jan. 27. At left is Fr. John Oh Woong-Jin. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Pope Francis prayed that a peaceful solution may be found in Venezuela as uncertainty and political instability grip the country.

After praying the Angelus Jan. 27 with residents and workers at the Casa Hogar el Buen Samaritano, a hospice for HIV/AIDS patients, the pope said he is "united with the people of Venezuela in these days."

"In front of the grave situation (Venezuela) is going through, I ask the Lord that a just and peaceful solution may be sought and achieved to overcome the crisis," he said.

More than two dozen have died following mass demonstrations against newly sworn in incumbent President Nicolas Maduro.

Following Maduro's inauguration, which many alleged was illegal due to vote rigging, many world leaders officially recognized Juan Guaido, president of the opposition-led legislature, as president. However, Maduro has refused to bow out.

"Respecting human rights and particularly hoping for the good of all the inhabitants of the country, I invite you to pray, placing this intercession under the protection of Our Lady of Coromoto, patroness of Venezuela," the pope said.

Francis also denounced the Jan. 27 bombing of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo, Philippines. Two bombs blasted the cathedral during Sunday Mass, killing 20 people and wounding dozens more.

Entrusting the victims of the attack to Jesus and Mary, the pope reiterated "my strongest condemnation for this episode of violence that once again strikes this Christian community."

"I raise my prayers for the dead and wounded. May the Lord, prince of peace, convert the hearts of the violent and give the inhabitants of that region a peaceful coexistence," he said.

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The pope also said he offered the final Mass of World Youth Day for the souls of the 10 victims of the Jan. 17 suicide bomb attack at a police academy in Bogota, Colombia.

Visibly moved, the pope asked the residents of the HIV/AIDS hospice to join him in remembering those who died in the attack by saying "present" as he read the names of the victims.

"May they be present before God," the pope said.

Also present at hourlong meeting with the pope were young people from the John Paul II Center, a hospice for people addicted to drugs and alcohol, as well as Hogar San Jose, a house for the poor run by the Missionaries of Charity and the Kkottongnae religious congregation, and the Malambo House, an orphanage for young girls.

Residents and staff cheered "Vive Jesus el Senor" ("Long live, Jesus the Lord") as the pope arrived at the Casa Hogar el Buen Samaritano.

Sr. Lourdes Reis, a member of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and director of Malambo House, held a bouquet of roses as she and Fr. Domingo Escobar, director of Casa Hogar el Buen Samaritano, welcomed Francis.

Seated in front of a banner depicting the Good Samaritan tending to the wounds of a bruised man, a young boy welcomed the pope through song. Wearing a Franciscan friars costume, the young boy serenaded Francis with his rendition of St. Francis' peace prayer.

"Make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is offense, let me bring pardon," the boy sang as the pope looked on.



Pilgrims cheer before Pope Francis' celebration of Mass for World Youth Day pilgrims at St. John Paul II Field in Panama City Jan. 27. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Thanking the directors and pastoral workers, the pope said the help provided at the centers was "a sign of the new life that the Lord wants to give us."

"It is easy to confirm the faith of some of our brothers and sisters when we see it at work in anointing wounds, renewing hope and encouraging faith," he said. "Nor are those we might call the 'primary beneficiaries' of your homes the only ones to be reborn; here the church and the faith are also born and continually recreated through love."

Reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the pope said Jesus calls on all people to "move from our fixed ways of doing things and our priorities" and take a moment to stop to care for one's neighbor.

The man left battered and bruised on the road, he noted, was nearly killed not just by the brutality of bandits "but also by the indifference of a priest and a Levite who

could not be bothered to come to his aid."

Indifference "can also wound and kill. Some for a few miserable coins, others for fear of becoming unclean."

Francis said places like the Good Samaritan Home and Hogar San Jose were signs "of God's concrete mercy and tender love, a living sign of the good news of the resurrection that even now is at work in our lives."

"To be here is to touch the maternal face of the church, which is capable of prophesying and creating a home, creating community," he said.

Before praying the Angelus, the pope entrusted the patients and volunteers to Mary, asking that, through her intercession, Christians may discover "who our neighbors are, and to help us go out quickly to meet them, to give them a home, an embrace, where care and fraternal love meet."

"I encourage you now to place beneath her mantle all your concerns and needs, all your sorrows and hurts," he said, "so that, as a Good Samaritan, she will come to us and aid us by her maternal love and with her smile, the smile of a mother."

This story appears in the **World Youth Day 2019** feature series. View the full series .