Vatican



Pope Francis waves to the crowd as he arrives to recite the Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St.Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday, July 4, 2021. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

by The Associated Press

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Pope Francis announced on Sunday that he'll go to Slovakia in September, adding a three-day visit to that European nation after a pilgrimage to neighboring Hungary.

It was already known that Francis planned to be in Budapest, Hungary's capital, to celebrate Mass on Sept. 12 at the end of a religious congress there.

But Francis told the public in St. Peter's Square that he was happy to announce that, "God willing," he'll travel later that day to Slovakia, staying until Sept. 15.

Pilgrims from Slovakia in the square cheered and held up the flag of their nation at the announcement. Francis cheerfully acknowledged their joy, saying "those Slovaks are happy, there!"

The Vatican said that while in Slovakia, Francis will visit the capital, Bratislava, as well as Presov, Kosice and Sastin.

Details of the trip will be unveiled at a later date, the Vatican said. Spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis had been invited by both the civil authorities and bishops of both countries.

"I thank from my heart all those who are preparing this trip, and I pray for them," Francis said. "Let us all pray for this trip and for the persons who are working to organize it."

Slovakia's foreign minister, Ivan Korcok, said the trip is a "great honor for Slovakia."

The nation's president, Zuzana Caputova, invited the pope when she visited the Vatican in December.

"I believe that the presence of Pope Francis will be for all of us a message of reconciliation and hope in these difficult times," Caputova said.

The last papal visit to the country was made in 2003 by Pope John Paul II.

[Karel Janicek contributed to this report from Prague.]

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