Vatican



Pope Francis greets journalists aboard his flight from Rome to Malta April 2, 2022. The pope was beginning a two-day trip to the Mediterranean archipelago. At right is Matteo Bruni, Vatican spokesman. (Paul Haring/CNS)



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ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT FROM VALLETTA — Pope Francis on April 3 said that he has not spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin since the country's war against Ukraine began and defended the Vatican's cautious diplomatic approach to the war.

"Every war is born from an injustice, always, because of the logic of war," Francis told reporters on a flight back to Rome following a two-day visit to Malta. The pope said the war was a source of personal pain for him.

"Jesus, have pity on us, all of us. We are all guilty," said Francis, who lamented that society is not accustomed to thinking in a "logic of peace."

The pope said that 60 years after World War II — and "despite all of the hopes" — society "forgot the lessons" promoted by the United Nations and other organizations committed to the cause of peace, and, instead, continues to make investments in new weapons.

Francis praised the Vatican's diplomatic corps for working intensely behind the scenes to bring about an end of war, but when recounting his actions against the war, he made clear that everything had been made public.

"I don't do double speak," Francis said, noting that he has twice spoken to Ukraine President Vladimir Zelensky and once to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill since the war's start.

"With Russia, I did it through the ambassador," whom he referred to as a "representative of the people," Francis said in reference to his Feb. 25 visit to Russia's Vatican embassy the day after the war began.

The visit marked a strong break with diplomatic protocol in which ambassadors are normally summoned to meet with heads of state.

When asked if he would visit Ukraine, the pope repeated what he told a reporter en route to Malta on April 2, that a potential visit to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv is "on the table."

The pope also added that he could potentially travel to Poland to visit refugees or to another location to meet with Kirill.

Both Zelensky and the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, have appealed to the pope to visit the country in an effort to bring about peace. On Friday, April 1, Polish President Andrzej Duda met with Francis and invited him to visit Poland as a way to show solidarity with the estimated 2 million Ukrainian refugees who have fled the war and are currently living in Poland.

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Despite the pope expressing an eagerness to continue traveling, the pope's knee problems presented him with severe mobility limitations during his brief stay in Malta.

On the flight back to Rome, the pope acknowledged that his sciatica "creates problems for me to walk."

The 85-year-old pope's health has been brought into sharp focus in the last two months after he was forced to cancel a day trip to the Italian city of Florence in February due to acute knee pain.

On Saturday, April 2, as he departed Rome for Malta, the pope was boarded into the plane via a lift, marking the first time in his 36 trips outside of Italy that he has been unable to use the stairs to board the aircraft.

During the closing Mass in Malta on Sunday, Francis remained seated for much of the liturgy, and appeared to have great difficulty walking.

Throughout his nearly decade-long papacy, Francis has not hesitated to stop and greet the throngs of pilgrims eagerly awaiting his arrival. But in Malta on Sunday, Francis did not even stand in the popemobile as it made its way throughout the crowd of an estimated 12,000.

"My health is a bit capricious," said Francis, who then added that "we don't know how the game will end."

This story appears in the **Pope Francis in Malta** feature series. View the full series.