



'To Bear Witness to the Light' - Jn 1:7

# The Catholic Reporter

Catholic Bishops' Conference of PNG & SI - Commission on Social Communications, P.O. Box 398, Waigani, NCD Tel: 325 9577 Fax: 323 2551

September 2024

Issue No: 225

## Pope to Papuans: God draws close to those who feel far away

- Joseph Tulloch

At Sunday Mass in Port Moresby, Pope Francis says that those on the margins of society are united with God and with their fellow humans.

On Sunday morning, Pope Francis celebrated Mass for the faithful in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

It was an early start in the Papuan capital, with Mass beginning at around 8am local time. According to local authorities, around 35,000 people were in attendance, including the nation's Prime Minister, James Marape.

**Distance from God:** In his homily, Pope Francis reflected on the day's Gospel reading, which describes Jesus' healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment.

The Pope focused in particular on two elements of the story: the "nearness" of Jesus and the "distance" of the deaf man.

The deaf man was distant, the Pope said, in that he hailed from the Decapolis, a land inhabited by pagans far from the religious centre of Jerusalem. He was "cut off from the



His Holiness Pope Francis with His Eminence John Cardinal Ribat MSC (Picture Courtesy: ©Vatican Media/Dicastery for Communication)

world, isolated, a prisoner of his deaf and mute condition."

**Jesus' closeness:** Pope Francis stressed that God's response to this distance – which, he noted, we have all felt at some time or another – is nearness. The Gospel shows Jesus

travelling out into the peripheries and meeting with those on the margins of the society, in order to "touch [their] lives and remove every distance."

"Through his nearness," the Pope said, "Jesus heals human muteness and deafness. Indeed, whenever we

feel distant, or we choose to keep ourselves at a distance from God, from our brothers and sisters or from those who are different from us, we close ourselves off, barricading ourselves from the outside ... However, Jesus draws near and, as with the deaf man, says to us, "Ephphatha", that is, "be opened" (Mk 7:34)."

**Distant yet united:** The Pope drew his sermon to a close by suggesting that the day's Gospel held a particular message for the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea:

"And you, brothers and sisters ... being in the Pacific, perhaps you feel that you are separated, separated from the Lord, separated from others, but that's not right: you are united, united in the Holy Spirit, united in the Lord, and the Lord says to each one of you: 'Open up!'. This is the most important thing: to open ourselves to God, open ourselves to our brothers and sisters, open ourselves to the Gospel and make it a compass for our lives."

## 'Pope's message for peace, solidarity will stay with Papua New Guinea for years'

- Claudia Torres

Fr. Giorgio Licini, an Italian PIME missionary in Port Moresby, tells Vatican News that Pope Francis' message of peace, solidarity, friendship, and reconciliation will accompany the people of Papua New Guinea for years to come.

"The Pope coming to Papua New Guinea is something unique, something that cannot happen frequently because of the distance and because this is not one of the most important countries of the world."

Fr. Giorgio Licini, the General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, made that affirmation in an interview with Vatican News, just moments before the start of Holy Mass at Sir John Guise Stadium in Port Moresby, on Sunday, 8 September.

A PIME missionary from northern Italy, Fr. Licini has been in the South Pacific country since 2003, and his experiences have given him a deeper

understanding of the primary obstacles the Catholic Church faces there.

He explained that "when it comes to witnessing Christ and the Gospel in society," social issues pose the biggest challenge.

Poverty, isolation, and the fact that many people "live in very remote and faraway villages" where schools and health facilities are lacking, are some of the issues he mentioned.

Fr. Licini also cited violence and "unrest, sometimes due to tribal fights and ancestral issues that [people] carry on with them."

Lastly, he observed that with urban poverty on the rise, many young people find themselves in a sort of limbo: "They cannot see a clear future with a lack of opportunities and poor education."

Yet, Fr. Licini remains hopeful, certain that Pope Francis' "message of peace, solidarity, friendship and

reconciliation" will accompany the people of Papua New Guinea for years to come.



Reverend Fr. Giorgio Licini PIME before the Papal Mass on Sunday September 8, 2024.



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# Pope Francis meets with Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

- Ezekiel Lawrence and Jessica Oata

Pope Francis was welcomed by PNG's Governor General, Sir Bob Dadae at the APEC Haus on Saturday, September 7, after his visit to Government House earlier in the morning.

He was warmly welcomed by a singsing group from the Motu Koita people, and other individuals dressed in traditional attire representing the diverse culture of Papua New Guinea.

Present at the APEC Haus Ballroom were Religious and Political Leaders, as well as the Pacific Island Leaders, the Diplomatic Corps, and representatives from the civil society.

Looking on with admiration was a number of people that turned up to get a glimpse of the Holy Fathers on his arrival at the APEC Haus.

In his address, the Holy Father thanked the Governor General Sir Bob Dadae for the warm welcome and the reception and extended his greetings to the people of Papua New Guinea.

He also expressed gratitude to the Authorities for helping the church, in a spirit of mutual cooperation and for the benefit of the common good, as she carries out many activities.

"In your homeland, an archipelago with hundreds of islands, more than 800 languages are spoken, corresponding to the just as many ethnic groups. This points to an extraordinary cultural richness. I must confess that this greatly fascinates me, also on a spiritual level, because I imagine that this enormous variety is a challenge to the Holy Spirit, who creates harmony amid differences!"

The Holy Father said that besides consisting of many islands and languages, PNG is also rich in natural resources elaborated that these goods are destined by God for the entire community.

He encouraged the Government leaders ensure that the needs of the local people are given due consideration when distributing the proceeds and employing workers in order to improve their living conditions, even if outside experts and large international companies are involved in the harnessing of these resources.

"These environmental and cultural treasures represent at the same time great responsibility because they require everyone, civil authorities and all citizens to promote initiatives that develop natural and human resources in a sustainable and equitable manner. A manner that improves the wellbeing of all, excluding nobody, through concrete programmes, international

cooperation, mutual respect and agreements beneficial to all parties".

His Holiness noted that a necessary condition for such lasting results is the stability of institutions which is fostered by agreement on certain essential points amidst different concepts and sensibilities present in society.

"Increasing institutional stability and building consensus on fundamental choices is a prerequisite for integral and fair development. It also requires a



The Holy Father giving his address at the APEC HAUS.

long-term vision and a climate of cooperation, mutual respect and agreements beneficial to all parties".

He also made special mention of his particular hope that tribal violence will come to an end for it causes many victims, prevents people from living in peace and hinders development.

"I appeal, therefore, to everyone's sense of responsibility to stop the spiral of violence and instead resolutely embark on the path that leads to fruitful cooperation for the benefit of all the people of the country".

Pope Francis also made a brief special mention regarding the status of Bougainville to find a definitive solution while avoiding the rekindling of ancient tensions.

He said by bolstering agreement on the foundation elements of civil society, together with the willingness of each person to sacrifice something from his or her point of view for the benefit of all, the necessary forces can be utilised to improve infrastructure, address the health and educational needs of the population and increase opportunities for dignified work.

"Sometimes, we forget that human beings need more than just the basic necessities of life. They also need great hope in their hearts. This allows them to

live fully, giving them the zest and courage to undertake wide-ranging projects and enables them to lift their gaze upward toward vast horizons".

He emphasised that an abundance of material goods is not enough to give birth to a life-giving, serene, hard-working and joyful society, which without a broader spiritual outlook turns in on itself and leads to a dryness of heart, resulting in a society that loses its way and forgets the correct hierarchy of values.

Encouraging those present and the viewers, the Holy Father said our attitudes and actions must be sustained by an inner strength, which shelters them from the risk of being corrupted or of losing the ability to recognise the value of work and the need to carry it out with dedication and devotion.

Reflecting on the theme and logo for the Papal Visit, the Holy Father said the Spiritual values infuse a soul and inspire and strengthen every project.

"The motto sums this up in one word: pray. A people that prays has a future, drawing strength and hope from above. The image of the bird of paradise on the logo is a symbol of freedom that no one and nothing can stifle because it is within us and is guarded by God who is love and wants his children to be free".

The Holy Father called on those who profess to be Christians to live their faith.

"Faith can become a lived culture, inspiring minds and actions and becoming a beacon of light that illuminates the path forward. It can also help society as a whole to grow and find good and effective solutions to its greatest challenges".

Commending the Christian communities for the works of charity they are carrying out in the country, the Holy Father urged them to always seek cooperation with public institutions and with all people of good will, beginning with their brothers and sisters belonging to other Christian denominations and other religions, for the sake of the common good of all the citizens of Papua New Guinea.

To conclude his speech, the Holy Father thanked the PNG Government and its people for opening the doors of our beautiful country, so far from Rome, yet so close to the heart of the Catholic Church.

The Holy Father was graced by a violinist team during his short stay at APEC Haus.

He also met Lady Veronica, the wife of PNG's first Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare.

Sir Julius Chan and other MPs including Deputy Prime Minister John Rosso were also present at APEC Haus during the visit.

## "I will pray for you...You must pray for me too" - Pope Francis

- Ezekiel Lawrence

On his final day of engagement in Papua New Guinea ends, Pope Francis left a lasting message that will forever be etched in the minds of all young people, and the Christian faithful in PNG, Solomon Islands and other parts of Oceania and the world. It is a message of prayer, to build and strengthen each other.



The Holy Father during the Youth Encounter

"I will pray for you. You must pray for me too," were the Holy Father's parting words after meeting with youths at Sir John Guise Stadium on Monday morning before leaving for Dili in Timor-Leste.

His encouragement for Peace, Love and Unity resonated through the nearly filled stadium captivating the minds of school aged children from Port

Moresby, Central Province, and other parts of the country.

The Holy Father encouraged all young people to uphold love as it is the foundation of peace and harmony. With a deepest empathy for young people,

Pope Francis asked everyone, "What is the language that unites us?"

Everyone shouted fervently in unison "LOVE!"

The Holy Father encouraged everyone to show Love to one and other, and lift each other up when they are down.

In his parting words, Pope Francis said, "Dear young people, I did not want to leave here without meeting you, because you are the hope for the future. And how do we build the future? What meaning do we want to give to our lives?..."

"You are the young people, you have to take care of others. Form friendship among yourselves. One thing I'm about to tell you may seem a bit strange, but it's something that is important to the

lives of young people, 'closeness to your grandparents and to your elders'. Let's all say together, 'Long live Grandparents'.... Thank you very much."

After engaging with the crowd in somewhat a gracious conversation, the pontiff received gifts from youths, and blessed the throng of people present before departing for APEC Terminal, Jacksons International Airport, in preparation for his flight to Dili.

He was farewelled at the airport by Acting Chief of Papua New Guinea Defence Force, Commodore Philip Polewara along with other dignitaries including, Prime Minister James Marape, government officials, and dignitaries of the Catholic church.

## His Holiness Pope Francis to Children: There is HOPE for everyone!

- Jessica Oata

'Viva Papa Francesco! Viva Papa Francesco! Viva Papa Francesco!'

The chant was echoed by students with joyful spirits as the Holy Father and his entourage were warmly welcomed into the gates of Caritas Technical Secondary School for the visit to the Children of the Street Ministry and Callan Services.

His Holiness was greeted by His Eminence John Cardinal Ribat MSC and Sr Mazarello Choi SCG.

In his welcome remarks to the Holy Father, Cardinal Ribat MSC said the visit by will provide everyone with consolation, support and

encouragement to continue live among the vulnerable members of the communities to promote justice and peace among them.

"There is room for everyone in the Catholic Church and this visit reminds us the vulnerable members of the society are not forgotten."

He concluded by assuring the Holy Father of our prayers, especially that he may have good health to carry out his ministry as the Vicar of Christ.

Two little children representing the Callan Services and the Street Ministry thanked the Holy Father for his Presence and the initiatives of the Catholic Church that enable them to

have a voice and be seen as people with dignity.

"We are truly blessed with your presence, we know you love all children because have come to meet with us".

Meanwhile in his address the Holy Father stressed that children are beautiful gifts from God and are unique in God's eyes.

"It is not only that there is hope for everyone but each of us have a role and a mission to fulfil, even if it involves difficulties".

His Holiness added that the most beautiful thing in our lives is to love and to welcome with open arms the love we receive from people.

The program concluded with the Holy Father giving blessing to everyone before leaving for the next program at Don Bosco Technological Institute.



Children bidding farewell to His Holiness as he leaves Caritas Technical Secondary School.

## Pope Francis: Have the courage to begin, experience the beauty of being present and have the hope of growing - Jessica Oata

The Mary Help of Christians Shrine at Don Bosco Technological Institute in Boroko was the gracious host to His Holiness Pope Francis, his entourage, the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands and the Pacific with hundreds of Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists.

The crowd prayed fervently in preparation of the Holy Father's encounter after his visit to the Children of Street Ministry and Callan Services.

The Holy Father was welcomed at the gates of Don Bosco Technological Institute with a traditional welcome by different cultural groups.

He was welcomed by His Eminence Sir John Cardinal Ribat MSC, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands His Lordship Bishop Otto Separy and the Rector of the Shrine Reverend Fr Albert Lenon SDB.

Following the welcome remarks by Bishop Separy to His Holiness were four testimonies given by a religious sister, a priest, a catechist and a representative of the Synod on Synodality.

Sharing her testimony about her ministry in the House of Hope in the Diocese of Mendi, Sr Lorena Jenal said that the House of Hope provides security, shelter, hope and healing and for those in need due to accusations of witchcraft and sorcery.

"We have been able to help 250 women and a small group of men. We provide a holistic approach with counselling, therapy, medical, psychological, financial and emotional help".

Sharing his testament as a priest was, Fr Emmanuel Moku, aged 64 years old. He was a late vocation from the Archdiocese of Port Moresby who was ordained in 2012 by His Eminence John Cardinal Ribat MSC when he was 52 years old.

He reflected on the obstacles that he encountered in his seminary formation because of his cultural background and a few challenges in his priestly ministry on a way forward for the local church.

Catechist Mr James Etariva from the Holy Family Parish, Kuriva in the Archdiocese of Port Moresby shared his journey as a Catechist.

"I began my service as a pastoral worker in 1982 at Holy Family Parish in the Archdiocese of Port Moresby. For 15 years, I did my pastoral work and then graduated as a full-time Catechist in 1997. Regardless of all the challenges, I am happy and I enjoy what I am doing because it is for the glory of God and to win more souls for heaven".

Giving her personal reflection on the challenges of synodality, Grace Wrakia, a lay woman, born, baptized and raised in a third-generation Catholic Family in Papua New Guinea gave a local metaphor of returning from a big feast in Rome (the Synod on Synodality) and bringing back home food (the Synthesis report) to share.

The speakers each posed the following questions respectively:

- How can we communicate to the deprived and those on the peripheries that Jesus Christ and his Church cares for them?
- What is your response to the constant struggle to integrate the Catholic faith and our cultural identity?
- How can we convey the enthusiasm for mission to young people?
- Will the method at the Synod of conversation at a round table work in my local church?

In his address to the Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons, Seminarians and Catechists, the Holy Father invited all to look at three aspects of our Christian and missionary journey that were highlighted in the testimonies: the *courage to begin*, the *beauty of being present* and the *hope of growing*.

**The Courage to begin:** the Holy Father mentioned that missionaries arrived in PNG in the middle of the nineteenth century and the first steps of their ministry was not easy.

"Indeed, some attempts failed, however, they did not give up; with great faith, apostolic zeal and many sacrifices, they continued to preach the Gospel and serve their brothers and sisters, starting again many times whenever they failed".

The Holy Father then recommended an important direction for evangelization to all present for their own 'starts' being the peripheries of this country and acknowledged in a special way those belonging to the most deprived segments of urban populations as well as the most deprived segments of urban populations and those who live in the most remote and abandoned areas where basic necessities are lacking.

"I think too of the marginalized and wounded, both morally and physically, by prejudice and superstition, sometimes to the point of having to risk their lives. The Church desires especially to be close to these brothers and sisters because in them Jesus is present in a special way".

**The beauty of being present:** the Holy Father reminded us that we are the most beautiful *treasure* in the eyes of God.

"Close to Jesus and under the mantle of Mary, we are spiritually united with all our brothers and sisters whom the Lord has entrusted to us and with those who cannot be here, ignited by the desire that the whole world may know the Gospel and share in its power and light".

In responding to Catechist James Etariva's question, the Holy Father said there is no specific technique for that but there is one proven way and that is to cultivate and share with them our joy of being the church (cf. BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Mass of Inauguration of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate, Aparecida, 13 May 2007).

The Holy Father also made reference to Grace Wrakia's sharing on the Synod reminding us by

esteeming and respecting one another and putting ourselves at the service of one another, we can show everyone we meet how beautiful it is to follow Jesus together and proclaim his Gospel.

"The beauty of being present is experienced not so much at large events and moments of success but rather in the faithfulness and love with which we strive to grow together every day".

**The hope of growing:** The Holy Father encouraged everyone to have the confidence in the fruitfulness of our apostolate, continuing to sow tiny seeds of good in the furrows of the world.

"Saint Paul reminds us that the growth of what we sow is not our own work but the Lord's. (cf. Mk 4:30-32). Holy Mother Church teaches the same thing when emphasizing that even with our own efforts, God is the one "who makes his kingdom to come on earth" (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree Ad Gentes, 42)."

Pope Francis invigorated everyone to evangelize patiently without allowing ourselves to be discouraged by difficulties or misunderstandings, even when they arise in places where we especially do not want to encounter them: in the family, for example.

"Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank the Lord together for how the Gospel has taken root and continues to spread in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Carry on your missions as witnesses of *courage*, *beauty* and *hope*! I thank you for what you are doing and I bless you all from my heart and I ask you, please do not forget to pray for me".



The Holy Father during his address (Picture Courtesy: ©Vatican Media/ Dicastero for Communication)

## Grace in His Presence: A reflection of Faith with Pope Francis

- Fr Albert Lenon SDB

**"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."** (Galatians 2: 20)

I was glad to know that Pope Francis would visit PNG, but even happier when I heard that he would visit MHC Shrine. It was with great excitement that I announced to our churchgoers this special occasion for the vicar of Christ to be in our midst. We began preparing – prayers, fellowship, confessions, decorations, cleaning, and cultural practices with traditional songs.

Amidst all the preparations, I received a shocking surprise. I was informed that I would be one of those who would welcome Pope Francis to MHC Shrine. I tried to contain my inner joy and refrained from telling anyone. As the days and hours drew closer, my heart would palpitate faster. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I would wake up and think of this grace-filled opportunity.

Finally, the day came, September 7, 2024, and we were all very busy with the final preparations – following up on the decorations, instructing the people, and checking the necessary details. I did my best to snatch moments of silence to create my sacred space and time, spiritually preparing myself: quietly absorbed in prayer in the chapel for a few minutes, holding onto the rosary, and lifting my face to the sky with a serene smile.

As I tried to recollect myself, I thought of the Gospel encounter between Jesus and Peter: the threefold questions (**John 21: 15-17**). I had three holy moments to be near the Pope.

The first was when he arrived in front of MHC Shrine. Together with Cardinal John Ribat, MSC, Bishop Otto Separy, and three people (two children) in traditional dress, I stood in front of our Holy Father. As he held my hands, I prayed for the people of PNG, my family, relatives, friends, those I had promised to pray for, and all my classmates and their families. In my heart, I heard: **"Feed my lambs."**

The second blessing came when Pope Francis was inside the church. As I presented him with the crucifix, carved in cultural design from Sepik Province, he held it in his hands and kissed it. In that moment of reverential respect, I recalled all those who are suffering – from sickness, natural calamities, war, personal pain, and exploitation. Deep in my conscience, I heard: **"Look after my sheep."**

The third blessing was a moment to cherish forever. After the Pope finished his message to the Bishops, Priests, Religious, Seminarians, and Catechists, I approached and gently supported his left arm and shoulder as he tried to stand. As I vested him with the stole for the solemn blessing, I held back tears of joy. I felt calm, serene, and at peace. I prayed and felt united with all my brother priests in mission

and those around the world, especially those suffering, persecuted, wounded, or facing crises in their vocation. I felt the presence of our Lord: **"Do you love me? Feed my sheep."**

As I savour and cherish these three grace-filled blessings of being with the successor of St. Peter, I reflect on myself as a Salesian, a priest, and a missionary. All is God's grace. I am deeply blessed.

Thank you, Lord, for your boundless love.



Fr Albert Lenon SDB and His Eminence John Cardinal Ribat MSC with the Holy Father...Picture supplied.

### Papal Visit Committee Chairperson: From the bottom of my heart - THANK YOU!

- Ahisha Mangot and Jessica Oata

**Port Moresby:** The Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands extended their heartfelt gratitude and acknowledgement to the government of Papua New Guinea, and those who have contributed to the successful three-day visit of the Pope.

The acknowledgement was given during the last of a series of Press Conferences hosted by the Catholic Bishops Conference for the Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father on Tuesday September 10, 2024 at the Catholic Bishops Conference.

The Press Conference started off with a word of prayer for thanksgiving by His Grace Archbishop Rochus Tatamai MSC from the Archdiocese of Rabaul.

Speaking during the Press Conference was the Papal Visit Committee Chairperson His Lordship Bishop Rozario Menezes SMM, Papal Visit General Coordinator Reverend Fr Lawrence Arockiaraj and the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference His Lordship Bishop Otto Separy.

“From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank each and every one who worked hard to make the visit of the Holy Father memorable both for the Holy Father and for each one of us”, Bishop Menezes said.

He also expressed his gratitude towards the government of Papua New Guinea especially the Department of Foreign Affairs under the leadership of Hon. Justin Tkatchenko and all the hardworking staff.

Bishop Menezes extended his appreciation of the other government bodies that were also directly involved in assisting the church like the Department of Information and Communication Technology, National Events, The Law Enforcement Agencies, National Capital District Commission, the civil society and everyone.

“Special thanks to the Apostolic Nunciature’s secretary Msgr. Federico Boni for his untiring efforts in organizing this Apostolic Journey. His hardwork and dedication made our work easy”.

Bishop Rozario also extended gratitude to the Papal Visit Committee General Coordinator Fr Lawrence Arockiaraj, the CBC General Secretary Fr Giorgio Licini PIME, the CBC Staff and the members of the Catholic Professional Society for their dedication, hard work and sleepless nights.

“Thank you to Sir John Cardinal Ribat MSC and the hosting Archdiocese of Port Moresby, all the parishes, institutions and religious communities who generously looked after the visiting pilgrims from the different dioceses of PNGSI. May the Lord reward your generosity,” Added Bishop Rozario.

“To the Bishop of Vanimo Bishop Francis Meli, Fr Miguel and the clergy, religious and faithful of the Dioceses of Vanimo, as well as the Hon. Governor Belden Namah and members of Sandaun Provincial Government, you have melted the heart of the Holy Father.”

“Special thanks to the Papal Visit Sub-Committees, especially Logistics, Liturgy, Communication/ Media, Security and Finance for your unwavering support, tireless efforts, which paved way for a cherished experience of grace” Bishop Rozario added.

“Our hearts are full of joy after having spent three days with the Holy Father. What more can we expect, after having experienced the joy of being with the Holy Father, praying, reflecting and sharing? The grace-filled experience lived with the Vicar of Christ is the result of the hard work of all those, tirelessly working around the clock to prepare for the Apostolic and state visit of the Holy Father. It was my privilege to lead the Papal Visit Committee,” Expressed Bishop Rozario.

General Coordinator Fr Lawrence Arockiaraj expressed his utmost and sincere gratitude to the Prime Minister Honourable James Marape and the PNG Government for accepting the Visit of His Holiness Pope Francis as both a State Visit and a Church Visit and the Department of Foreign Affairs for closely working with the Catholic Church to ensure that all went well.

“I would also like to thank the two main broadcasters of the event - NBC and EMTV for a job well done in ensuring that our people were part of the Papal Visit and everyone for their prayers and support”.

CBC PNGSI President Bishop Otto Separy thanked the media for their unwavering dedication in ensuring that the Papal Visit was brought to the Catholic Faithful and people of goodwill who could not be part of the program to be part of it from their homes, sick beds and offices.

“You media people have played a very crucial role in the Papal Visit. You have been with us right from the beginning when we first announced the confirmation of the Papal Visit during our Annual General Meeting Press Conference and you have journeyed with us as we prepared for this historic occasion in all our Press Conferences giving updates, during the event itself and now were are here for the last time to thank you”.

Bishop Otto also thanked the brave young people who put their hands up to be Marshalls during the event.

“To all those young people who volunteered to be Marshalls, your effort is appreciated. I am sure working alongside our Law Enforcing Agencies and playing a crucial role in this historical event has had an impact on your life and you should be proud of the contribution you have made”.



General Coordinator of the Papal Visit Committee Fr Lawrence Arockiaraj during the last Press Conference.

### Tari man’s Papal Blessing

- Andrew Molen

**Port Moresby:** If there was one important message that Mundiya Kepanga got from Pope Francis, it is to treasure his culture and never lose it.

“Em i tokim mi ‘no ken lusim bilas bilong yu, kalsa em i bikpela samting’ (he told me, do not lose your culture, it is very important),” Mr. Kepanga recalled.

“Em i tokim mi tu long planim diwai na lukautim ples (he also told me to look after the land and the environment),” he said.

Mr. Kepanga is a proud Tari Chief who had the opportunity of meeting Pope Francis at the Vatican. He visited the Pope in May this year where they discussed various issues affecting communities in Papua New Guinea. Among them were youths and women. They also talked about the Holy Father’s trip to the country.

“Mi kisim bikpela blesing tru long bungim Papa Pop na mi kam bek wantaim bikpela amamas na bel isi (It was a great blessing to me to meet the Pope and I am filled with joy and peace),” said Mr. Kepanga.

“Mi amamas long harim olsem em bai kam long PNG na mi lukfowet long bungim em gen na amamas wantaim olgeta pipel bilong yumi (I am excited about his trip to PNG and I look forward to celebrating it with everyone).

“Dispela raun bilong em i kam long hia em i bikpela blesing long kantri na tu long mi yet, na yumi olgeta I mas amamas na wok wantaim (this Papal Visit is a blessing to the country and also for me to be part of this event, we must all be excited and joyful),” he said.



### Diocese of Aitape Pilgrims attend Holy Father’s address in Vanimo

- Sr Maria Tongop PBVM

**Vanimo:** The little peaceful town of Vanimo came to life as multitudes of pilgrims from the Diocese of Aitape traveled to Vanimo to join other Catholic faithful and people of goodwill during the Holy Father’s short visit on September 8, 2024.

Participating pilgrims came in different age groups ranging from infants, children, the youth, men, women and the elderly. While some were fortunate enough to get on some form of transportation, most walked for three to four days to get to Vanimo, just like their brethren who walked from the Archdiocese of Mount Hagen to Port Moresby.

With the Papal Visit theme being ‘Pray’, the pilgrims committed themselves along with their faith and respective personal intercessions in prayer and sacrifice until they reached Vanimo.

With the Dioceses of Aitape and Vanimo considered to be in the peripheries of the local church here in PNG, one



Bishop of Vanimo Diocese His Lordship Francis Meli in the final moments of preparation before the Holy Father’s arrival in Vanimo...Picture supplied.

can only imagine the struggle and resilience the faithful faced.

Just as ‘Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth’, it was very generous and touching for the Holy Father, Pope Francis to go all the way to Vanimo

to fulfil his dream of embracing the world’s remotest peripheries.

The Diocese of Aitape consists of three deaneries: Nuku, Lumi and Aitape and had almost five thousand (5000) pilgrims going to Vanimo from the 32 parishes.

The people stood proudly with hearts burning with great joy and a spirit of peace and harmony filled the atmosphere as the Holy Father graced them with his presence at the Esplanade in the Vanimo bringing to them the message of Hope.

Sentiments of satisfaction and joy was shared by all who were present as they had the opportunity of a lifetime to see the Vicar of Christ Jesus, Pope Francis in person and receive spiritual blessings from him.

Although the Holy Father’s visit was short, galleries of little mementos of the Holy Father in Vanimo and tales of his visit that brought hope to the people and will be told and passed down to the next generation.

## The Catholic Reporter Team

You are invited to send in your articles, photograph and reflections on events and happenings in your parish, community, institution and diocese. Please send in your material to: [socom@catholic.org.pg](mailto:socom@catholic.org.pg) on or before **20th of the Month, 2024.**

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