

## Program for the Pope's trip to the Holy Land, under the flag of ecumenism

On March 27, the Holy See published the official program for Pope Francis' trip to the Holy Land, that will last from May 24 to 26, 2014. The highlight of this three-day visit to Jordan, Palestine and Israel will be the Sovereign Pontiff's meeting with the Patriarch of



Constantinople, **Bartholomew I**, during which they will participate in an ecumenical prayer with representatives of the different communities of Jerusalem at the Holy Sepulcher. This meeting will commemorate the meeting held on January 5, 1964, between Pope **Paul VI** and the Patriarch of Constantinople, **Athenagoras**, in Jerusalem.

On May 24, Pope Francis will arrive in Amman, the capital of Jordan, around 1:00 p.m. He will celebrate Mass at 4:00 p.m. in the city's stadium. That evening he will visit the site of Our Lord's baptism, on the banks of the Jordan, and will meet with Syrian refugees and handicapped people.

On May 25, the Sovereign Pontiff will take a helicopter to Bethlehem, where he will first go to the presidential Palace to meet the Palestinian president **Mahmoud Abbas**, and the Palestinian authorities. At 11:00 a.m. he will go to the site of the Manger to celebrate Mass according to the Latin Christmas Day liturgy, with elements of other rites. In these holy places, it is indeed permitted to celebrate the liturgy of the site's feast day every day.

Pope Francis will then take the helicopter again at 4:00 p.m. to Jerusalem. The first meeting will be at 6:15 p.m. at the Apostolic Delegation, where he will meet privately with Patriarch Bartholomew I and sign a common declaration with him. At 7:00 p.m., the pope will preside at an ecumenical meeting in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the meeting between Athenagoras and Paul VI.

"Unfortunately, the stop in Nazareth had to be skipped because of a lack of time and other priorities," lamented Bishop **Giacinto Boulos Marcuzzo**, Vicar of the Latin Patriarchate of Israel. We would have liked for the Christians of Nazareth to be able to meet Pope Francis in their own town. The Christians of Galilee can go to Bethlehem for the Pope's Mass, but the symbolic aspect is not the same." According to him, the goal of Pope Francis' visit, besides meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew I, is to work for peace. Peace is, indeed, the first condition for a Christian future in the Middle East and not only in Israel and Palestine. "In this sense, peace is also a pastoral matter," declared Bishop Marcuzzo.

The next morning, on May 26, at 8:15, Pope Francis will go to the Esplanade of Mosques to meet the grand mufti. At 10:00, the pontiff will go to the Shoah memorial, Yad Vashem, then he will visit the two grand rabbis of Israel, near the great Synagogue of Jerusalem. The pontiff will be received at the presidential Palace at 11:45 by President **Shimon Peres**, and will meet in private with the Prime Minister **Benyamin Netanyahu**. After lunch, the Pope will again meet with the Patriarch of Constantinople, near the Orthodox Church of the Mount of Olives.

The last stop will be to celebrate Mass exceptionally at the Cenacle, site of the birth of the Church, with the Catholic bishops of the Holy Land. Pope Francis will take off for Rome from the airport of Ben Gourion at 8:15 p.m.

The Holy See and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem have made this trip official, in spite of rumors that it would be cancelled because of a prolonged strike among the employees of the Israeli ministry of Foreign Affairs. “The preparations for the trip continue as planned,” stated Fr. **Federico Lombardi**, director of the Holy See’s Press Agency, shortly after the program was published. “We are aware that the situation in Israel is one of syndical tension,” he continued, “but hope that formal contact with the competent authorities will soon be renewed in order to ensure a good preparation for the Pope’s visit.”

(sources: apic/imedia/VIS – DICl no.295 dated April 25, 2014)