



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I see that you have come not only from the far reaches of the Peruvian Amazon, but also from the Andes and neighbouring countries. What a beautiful image of the Church without borders, where all peoples have a place! How much we need moments like these, to be together and, regardless of our place of origin, to inspire us to build a culture of encounter that renews us in hope.

I thank Bishop David for his words of welcome. I also thank Arturo and Margarita for sharing their experiences with us. They said: “You are visiting a land that is mostly forgotten, wounded and marginalized... but we are not a no man’s land”. Thank you for saying this: we are not a no man’s land. It is something that needs to be emphasized. You are not a no man’s land. This land has names. It has faces. It has you.

**This area has a beautiful name: Madre de Dios, Mother of God.** How can I not speak of Mary, a young woman who lived in a remote, isolated village, also considered by many to be a “no man’s land”. There she received the greatest greeting and invitation imaginable: to be the Mother of God. There are joys that only little ones can hear (cf. Mt 11:25).

**You have in Mary not only an example to whom you can look, but also a Mother.** Wherever there is a mother, we don’t have that terrible feeling of belonging to no one, that takes hold when our sense of belonging to a family, to a people, to a land, to our God, begins to fade. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the first thing I would like to say, and I want to say it loud and clear: This is not a land of orphans, but a land that has a Mother! And if it has a mother, it has sons and daughters, a family, a community. Where

there is a mother, a family and a community, problems may not disappear, but we certainly find the strength to confront them differently.

It is painful to think that some want to reject this certainty and make Madre de Dios a nameless land, without children, a barren land. A place easy to commercialize and exploit. That is why it is good for us to repeat in our homes and communities, and in the depths of each of our hearts: This is not a land of orphans! It has a Mother! This good news has been passed on from generation to generation thanks to the efforts of so many who share this gift of knowing that we are God's children and who help us to know one another as brothers and sisters.

On a number of occasions, I have spoken of the throwaway culture. A culture that is not satisfied with exclusion, but advances by silencing, ignoring and throwing out everything that does not serve its interests; as if the alienating consumerism of some is completely unaware of the desperate suffering of others. It is an anonymous culture, without bonds, without faces. A motherless culture that only wants to consume. The earth is treated in accordance with this logic. Forests, rivers and streams are exploited mercilessly, then left barren and unusable. Persons are also treated in the same way: they are used until someone gets tired of them, then abandoned as "useless".

Speaking of these things, allow me to bring up another painful subject. We have become accustomed to using the term "human trafficking", but in truth we should speak of slavery: slavery for work, sexual slavery, slavery for profit. It is painful to see how in this land, which is under the protection of the Mother of God, so many women are devalued, denigrated and exposed to endless violence. Violence against women cannot be treated as "normal", maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. It is not right for us to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon.

Many people have immigrated to Amazonia in search of housing, land and work. They come in search of a better future for themselves and their families. They abandon poor, yet worthy lives. Many of them, in the hope that certain jobs will bring an end to their precarious situations, are drawn by the promising allure of gold mining. Gold, however, can turn into a false god that demands human sacrifices.

False gods, the idols of avarice, money and power, corrupt everything. They corrupt people and institutions, and they ruin the forest. Jesus said that there are demons that require much prayer to expel. This is one of them. I encourage you to continue organizing into movements and communities of every kind in order to help overcome these situations. I likewise encourage you to gather, as people of faith and vibrant ecclesial communities, around the person of Jesus. Through heartfelt prayer and hope-filled encounter with Christ, we will be able to attain the conversion that leads us to true life. Jesus promised us true life, authentic life, eternal life. Not a make-believe life, like the one offered by all those dazzling false promises; they promise life but lead us to death.

Salvation is not something generic or abstract. Our Father looks at real people, with real faces and histories. Every Christian community must be a reflection of this gaze, this presence that creates bonds and generates family and community. It is a way of making visible the kingdom of heaven, in communities where everyone feels a part of the whole, where they feel called by name and encouraged to be a builder of life for others.

I have hope in you, in the hearts of all those people who seek a blessed life. You have come to seek that life here, amid one of the most exuberant explosions of life on our planet. Love this land, realize that it belongs to you. Breathe it in, listen to it, marvel at it. Fall in love with this land called Madre de Dios, commit yourself to it and care for it. Do not use this land as a mere disposable object, but as a genuine treasure to be enjoyed, cultivated and entrusted to your children.

Let us commend ourselves to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, and place ourselves under her protection. Please, keep praying for me.

Hail Mary...