



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO CHILE AND PERU

(15-22 JANUARY 2018)

VISIT TO LITTLE PRINCE CHILDREN'S HOME

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Puerto Maldonado

Friday, 19 January 2018

[Multimedia]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Children,*

Thank you very much for this lovely reception and for your words of welcome. Seeing you sing, seeing you dance makes me very happy. Thank you.

When I was told about the existence of “The Little Prince” Home and the Apronia Foundation, I felt that I could not leave Puerto Maldonado without greeting you. You wanted to come from various homes to meet here in the *Little Prince Home*. Thank you for the efforts you made to be here today.

Not long ago, we celebrated Christmas. Our hearts were touched by the image of the Child Jesus. He is our treasure. You children are the reflection and a treasure for all of us, the most beautiful treasure that we have, and one that we are called to guard. Forgive us those times when we adults have not cared for you, and when we did not give you the importance you deserve. When you grow up, don't forget. Your faces, your lives constantly demand a greater commitment and effort on our part, lest we become blind or indifferent to all those other children who suffer and are in need. Without a doubt, you are the greatest treasure that we have to care for.

Dear children of the *Little Prince Home* and young people from the other homes. Sometimes, at night, some of you feel sad. You miss your father and mother who are not here, and I know too that sometimes you feel very hurt. Dirsey, you were brave and you shared that with us. You told me; “I hope my message may be a light of hope”. But let me tell you something. Your life, your words, and the lives of all of you, are a light of hope. I want to thank you for your witness. Thank you for being a light of hope for all of us.

I am happy to see that you have a home where you are welcomed, and where, with affection and friendship, there are people who help you to see that God takes you by the hand and puts dreams in your heart. This is wonderful.

What a wonderful witness, too, is offered by all of you young people who have travelled this road, who found love in this home and now are able to shape your own future! You demonstrate to all of us the enormous potential of each person. For these boys and girls, you are the best example to follow, a sign of hope that they will be able to do the same. We all need good role models: children need to look to the future and have positive role models. They need to think and say: “I want to be like him, I want to be like her”. Everything that you young people can do, like coming here to be with them, to play and spend time together, is important. Be for them, as the Little Prince says: *the little stars that light up the night* (cf. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, XXIV; XXVI).

Some of you young people here come from native communities. Sadly, you have seen the destruction of the woodlands. Your elders taught you to discover them; there they found their food and the medicine that brought them healing. You showed us this at the beginning here. Today those woodlands have been laid waste by the intoxication of a misguided notion of progress. The rivers that hosted your games and provided you with food are now muddied, contaminated, dead. Young people, do not be resigned to what is happening! Do not renounce the legacy you have received from your elders, or your lives and dreams.

I would like to encourage you to study. Get an education, take advantage of the opportunities you have for schooling, this opportunity that the Apronia Foundation offers you. The world needs you, young men and women of the first peoples, and it needs you, not disguised, but as you are. Not disguised as citizens from another land, no, as you are, that’s how we need you. Do not be content to be the last car on the train of society, letting yourselves be pulled along and eventually disconnected. No, never be the last car. We need you to be the engine, always pressing forward. And I offer you some advice: listen to your elders; value their traditions; do not curb your curiosity. Get in touch with your roots, but at the same time open your eyes to new things; bring the old and the new together in your own way. Share what you learn with the world, because the world needs you to be yourselves, who you really are, and not an imitation of someone else. We need you to be authentic, young men and women who are proud to belong to the Amazonian peoples and who can offer humanity an alternative for a true life. My friends, society often needs to correct its course and you, the young of the first peoples, can help greatly – of this I am sure – to meet this

challenge, above all by teaching us a way of life based on protection and care, not on the destruction of everything that stands in the way of our greed.

And one of the main things, also, is that I want to thank Father Xavier [Arbex de Morsier, founder of the Apronia Association]. Father Xavier has suffered much and given a lot to this work: quite simply, thank you, thank you for your example. I want to thank the religious brothers and sisters, the lay missionaries who are doing such wonderful work, and all the benefactors who are part of this family. I also thank the volunteers whose gift of time is like a balm soothing every wound. Likewise, I thank all those who confirm these young people in their Amazonian identity and help them to forge a better future for their communities and for our entire world.

And now, just as we are, let us close our eyes and ask God to give us his blessing.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he let his face shine upon you and show you his mercy. May he turn his countenance towards you and give you his peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen (cf. Num 6:24-26; Ps 67; Blessing in Ordinary Time).

Let me ask you two things. To pray for me and to not forget that you are *the little stars that light up the night*.