



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO IRAQ

[5-8 March 2021]

**WORDS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO JOURNALISTS ON THE FLIGHT TO IRAQ**

Papal flight

Friday, 5 March 2021

[Multimedia]

Matteo Bruni:

Good morning, Your Holiness, and good morning to you all. After many months we are once again on a papal flight, fifteen months. In the meantime habits have changed, and this very image says it all [the journalists and the Pope are all wearing face masks]: we must all respect the healthcare measures.

I thank you, Your Holiness, for your wish to be a pilgrim in Iraq, the land of Abraham, with its people, its Christians. You said a few days ago: "One cannot disappoint a people for the second time", and we thank you for your wish to be accompanied by a large group of journalists: it was not to be taken for granted. There are 74 of us, from 15 countries, and for 14 journalists it is their first time on a papal flight. We await the gestures and words of the coming days, and in the meantime, we thank you.

Pope Francis:

Good morning, and thank you for the company. Thank you for coming. I am happy to resume the trips, and this is an emblematic journey. It is also a duty towards a land that has been tormented for so many years. Thank you for accompanying me. I will try to follow the instruction and not

shake hands with anyone, but I do not want to stay far away: I will come round to greet you at closer quarters. Many thanks.

[The Pope makes a “tour” of the journalists].

I wish you a good journey. I would just like to... They had said to me that it was the birthday of one of you today, but perhaps it was a mistake... And the second thing I would like to say is that there are absences that are keenly felt, and today the role of “dean” of the press corps has been passed from Valentina [Alazraki] to [Philip] Pulella. Valentina’s absence makes me rather sad, because she has accompanied us, the Popes, for 40 or 50 years... But I hope she will be with us on the next journey. And Pulella is our dean for this journey. Thank you!

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