

Pope Francis in Summertime –

1. He Goes to the Circus:



On July 31, the Ostia Lido Amusement Park in Rome received a very special visitor – Pope Francis. On his arrival in the Park, located one hour from Rome, the Holy Father was received warmly with a small and slim poster, which said: “Ostia’s Luna Park Embraces You.”

The objective of the visit was to give support and express gratitude to the merry-go-round operators and circus people, who have faced difficult times since the COVID-19 pandemic.

During his visit, Pope Francis stressed the importance of the work of circus artists, thanking them for “*making people smile*” in times of war, crises and social ills. This wasn’t the first time that the Pope showed his support to this community; he had a similar meeting with them in 2015.

The main reason for the visit was the blessings of a stature of the “Madonna Protettrice dello Spettacolo Viaggiante e del Circo” [Our Lady Protectress of Travelling Entertainment and the Circus]. On his arrival, Pope Francis paused before the image of the Virgin, located in a column inside the Park, and made the sign of the cross, in an act of devotion shared with those present.

Under a 35-degree blazing sun, the Pope arrived around 3:05pm in a Fiat 500 L, and was welcomed effusively by Sister Geneviève Jeanningros who, together with her colleague Anna Amelia, has spent 56 years living in a caravan between merry-go-round operators, carrying out pastoral work inspired by Charles de Foucauld. Sister Geneviève organized the visit of the Pope, who called her affectionately “enfant terrible.” The Holy Father was taken to a games room used for children’s parties and was received with thunderous applause. Surrounded by colourful cartoon characters, ball pits and candy machines, the Pope sat down and shared a moment full of joy with the community. In his brief address, he thanked everyone for their work and greeted several children and adults.

One of the most emotive moments was when 9-year-old Oscar gave the Pope a carillon in the shape of a carousel and a letter with 5 euros to buy himself an ice cream. The Pope was also moved on hearing the personal stories of some of the families, showing his empathy and support at all times. The meeting culminated with a small show of clowns and acrobats in honour of the Holy Father, who enjoyed the show raising his thumb and laughing with the artists’ tricks.





Before leaving, the Pontiff thanked everyone again for the warm reception and for their work. His farewell was marked by embraces and photographs. The Pope left by car, leaving a profound impression in all those present. Sister Geneviève expressed her gratitude for the Pope's visit to the Vatican media, highlighting the closeness and love that the community feels for him. "We felt the Pope very close. It's an enormous joy for all of us," she said excitedly.



Pope Francis' gesture, on a hot summer's day, offered a breath of hope and joy to a community that has gone through difficult times, reaffirming his commitment to take the Church's message of love and support to all corners.

The Pope in his little Fiat 500



Taken from Zenit.org: <https://zenit.org/2024/07/31/pope-francis-goes-to-the-circus-photos-of-a-parish-pope-among-clowns-and-trapeze-artists>

...and 2... In mid-June Pope Francis hosts ‘a conclave of comedians’ at the Vatican!

Pope Francis tells comedians: It’s OK to laugh at God



Whoopi Goldberg meets Pope Francis

Dear friends, It is my pleasure to welcome all of you, and to express my gratitude to those in the Dicastery for Culture and Education who have organized this meeting.

I hold you in high esteem as artists who express yourselves through the language of comedy, humour, and irony. Among all the professionals working in television, cinema, theatre, print media, with songs, and on social media, you are among the most loved, sought after, and popular. Certainly, it is because you are very

good at what you do, but there is also another motivation: you have and cultivate the gift of making people laugh.

In the midst of so much gloomy news, immersed as we are in many social and even personal emergencies, you have the power to spread peace and smiles. You are among the few who have the ability to speak to all types of people, from different generations and cultural backgrounds.

In your own way, you unite people, because laughter is contagious. It is easier to laugh together than alone: joy opens us to sharing and is the best antidote to selfishness and individualism. Laughter also helps to break down social barriers, create connections among people, and allows us to express emotions and thoughts, contributing to building a shared culture and creating spaces of freedom. You remind us that homo sapiens is also homo ludens ‘[playful]’! For playful fun and laughter are central to human life, to express ourselves, to learn, and to give meaning to situations.

Your talent is a precious gift. Together with a smile, it spreads peace in our hearts and among others, helping us to overcome difficulties and cope with everyday stress. It helps us find relief in irony and go through life with humour. I like to pray daily with the words of Saint Thomas More: “Grant me, O Lord, a good sense of humour”. I ask for this grace for every day because it helps me approach things with the right spirit. You also succeed in bringing about another miracle: you manage to make people smile even while dealing with problems and events, large and small. You denounce abuses of power; you give voice to forgotten situations; you highlight abuses; you point out inappropriate behaviour. You do this without spreading alarm or terror, anxiety or fear, as other types of communication tend to do; you rouse people to think critically by making them laugh and smile. You do this by telling stories of real life, narrating reality from your unique viewpoint; and in this way, you speak to people about problems, large and small.

According to the Bible, at the beginning of the world, while everything was being created, divine wisdom practiced your form of art for the benefit of none other than God himself, the first spectator of history. It is described in this way: “I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons and daughters” (Prv 8:30-31). Remember this: when you manage to draw knowing smiles from the lips of even one spectator, you also make God smile.

You, dear artists, know how to think and speak humorously in different forms and styles; and in each case the language of humour is suitable for understanding and “feeling” human nature. Humour does not offend, humiliate, or put people down according to their flaws. While communication today often generates conflict, you know how to bring together diverse and sometimes contrary realities. How much we need to learn from you! The laughter of humour is never “against” anyone, but is always inclusive, purposeful, eliciting openness, sympathy, empathy.

I am reminded of the story in the book of Genesis when God promised Abraham that within a year he would have a son. He and his wife Sarah were old and childless. Sarah listened and laughed inwardly. Abraham must have done the same. However, Sarah conceived and bore a son in her old age, at the time that God had set. Then Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me" (Gen 21:6). That is why they named their son Isaac, which means, "he laughs". Can we laugh at God? Of course, we can, just as we play and joke with the people we love. The Jewish wisdom and literary tradition is a master in this! It is possible to do this without offending the religious sentiments of believers, especially the poor. Dear friends, may God bless you and your art. Continue to cheer people up, especially those who have the hardest time looking at life with hope. Help us, with a smile, to see reality with its contradictions, and to dream of a better world! With heartfelt sentiments, I bless you; and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

One report of the meeting

Pope Francis gets laughs at meeting with big-name comedians

Pope Francis got a chuckle from an audience of comedians on Friday morning after he suggested throwing away his prepared remarks for simply making people laugh with a silly gesture. Following the advice of St. Thomas Aquinas, who said, "*Those who lack playfulness are sinful*," the pope joked that instead of reading his prepared speech, "*I'll do this, and we will all laugh*," as he held his thumb to his head and wiggled his fingers.



Pope Francis took the stage in front of over 100 comics, stand-up comedians, and humourists, including Americans Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, and Conan O'Brien, on June 14 in the largest — and possibly only — gathering of comics in the Vatican since Pope Pius V eliminated the role of the papal jester in the 1500s. U.S. comedians Jim Gaffigan, Chris Rock, Tig Notaro, Mike Birbiglia, and Whoopi Goldberg also took part, as well as British TV writer and comedian Stephen Merchant and Irish comedians Ardal O'Hanlon, Tommy Tiernan and Patrick Kielty.

Stephen Colbert told EWTN News after shaking hands with the pope that the connection between faith and humour is "*in the back of my mind all the time*." "I mean, not in the front of my mind, in the front of my mind is what the joke is. But at a certain point in the back of the mind you have to say, '*Do I want to tell that joke? And does that go with everything else that you are besides a comedian?*'"

"*Especially doing political satire, you're kind of dancing around with a knife in your hand a lot and you want to be careful who and what you cut*," the host of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" added. "*So it was lovely to hear the pope acknowledge that there's a value in that for people's hearts, and it made me think a little bit harder about how I want to use it*."

Jim Gaffigan came to the Vatican with his wife, Jeannie, and 11 and 12-year-old sons, Patrick and Michael. "*I know that [Pope Francis] has always liked comedy*," Gaffigan said in comments to CNA. "*If I was like Stephen Colbert, educated about Catholicism, I'd be able to reference St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Thomas More and all that stuff, but I can't. I'm just a dumb guy that went to church and tried to listen. But I pay attention more now*."

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