

## Papal Visit to Romania 2019

Romania symbolizes well the experience and the challenges of the modern world. Human habitation on its land dates back 40,000 years, among the oldest in Europe. Romanians have a long and deep cultural history. Their identity is strong. At the same time, Romania is a multiethnic society including Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and an admixture of Germans, Turks, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians. The language itself mirrors the multi-ethnicity: 30% of the words are of Latin origin, 10% of Slavic origin, 5% French, 20% from local historic languages, with a smattering of Hungarian, German, and Turkish words in the general vocabulary. As an important travel route and a land rich in resources from agriculture to oil, Romania has survived the wars and the politics of empires not their own. The Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Hungarian Empires all had significant roles in the political and social history of Romania. It is thus a symbol of a complex unity made up of great diversity that marks the globalized sense of our world today. And, as we have seen the rise of religious movements of political importance in the world during the last twenty years, it is worth noting that Christian faith in diverse confessions has played a major role in maintaining the dignity of Romanians. The Pope's visit to Romania contains a message for the world.

A living faith has been salvific for various communities within Romania. Since the time of Saint Stephan in the eleventh century, Hungarians have had a strong devotion to Mary and her intercession was sought by Hungarians in Transylvania in the 17th century when they came under attack by German nobility. Although a Latin culture for the most part, Romanians in eastern Romania chose the Byzantine rite in defence of its people from central European missionaries. To preserve the culture further, Romania changed from the Latin alphabet to Cyrillic in order to protect the identity of its people. After four centuries, when there was no further threat, Romanians returned to the Latin alphabet. In these and other events, we see the importance of a living faith for the identity of a community, a people.

Despite being used to wars and imperial pretensions, the twentieth century brought a level of suffering to Romania that was unforeseeable. The division of the country by Nazi and Soviet forces, the genocide of Jews and Roma in World War II, the suppression of churches and the brutal extermination of priests and bishops of various confessions by Soviet forces, were events bound to leave scars in the popular memory. What did the pope have to offer to such a people?

It should be noted that and the President of Romania, an Evangelical Lutheran of German origin, invited a Catholic Pope to a country where 80% count themselves Orthodox. The pope first addressed their history. The people's faith, time and again, led them to strive for unity among a diversity that foreign powers tried to exploit. We can dwell on our past pains, said Pope Francis, but we should remember our joys even more. Romania teaches the world how to celebrate the gift of diversity as a gift of the Holy Spirit instead of trying to reduce everyone to an unjust uniformity. As with the peoples of the Scriptures, we must remember what the Lord has done among us much more than lament the wounds of the past. Pope Francis and Patriarch Daniel both underscored that this blessed memory must lead us today to reach into society where there is need. Social action, philanthropy, justice, particular care for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized are the indications of a living faith today.



PONTIFICAL  
ORIENTAL  
INSTITUTE

Along with the Orthodox community, the Pope made a special and prophetic appeal to youth and families. He first noted the disorienting aspects of our tense world: much noise without listening; confusion without harmony; ambiguity instead of clarity; the feeling exclusion that promotes social division; sensationalism and high-speed messaging instead of caring for the integrity of the person; a culture that does not care to distinguish falsity from truth. Against this onslaught we need community, the community of family, of reaching out, of knowing one another face to face, of calling each other by name. Our faith today, using all the means available to us, should inspire us to create community where it is most at threat.

Pope Frances showed in action what he said in words. He kissed the handicapped, embraced little children, he listened to the presentations of youth, he honoured the aged, he prayer with Orthodox believers. He showed what was best in Romanians and asked that their light shine yet more, the light of a faith in a living, compassionate God.

David E. NAZAR, SJ  
*Rector*

