'The footsteps of Joseph and Mary': Pope Francis urges Catholics not to ignore migrants' plight this Christmas

In a mass in Bethlehem, an archbishop used his homily to lambast the "Herods of today".

POPE FRANCIS IS set to give his traditional Urbi et Orbi Christmas address, after urging the world’s 1.3 billion Catholics not to ignore the plight of migrants “driven from their land” because of leaders willing to shed “innocent blood”.

“So many other footsteps are hidden in the footsteps of Joseph and Mary,” the Argentine pontiff, himself the grandson of Italian migrants, told worshippers at Christmas Eve mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica.

“We see the tracks of millions of persons who do not choose to go away but, driven from their land, leave behind their dear ones.”

Many engulfed in the ongoing migration crisis were forced to flee from leaders “who, to impose their power and increase their wealth, see no problem in shedding innocent blood”, said the 81-year-old.

The pontiff’s plea for “hope” came as fresh tensions simmered in the West Bank following President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Following Trump’s lead, Guatemala’s President Jimmy Morales said yesterday his country would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Trump’s announcement on 6 December unleashed demonstrators and clashes, including in
Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank where Christians marked the birth of Jesus at a midnight mass.

**Fewer tourists in Bethlehem**

Celebrating midnight mass in the ancient town, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, used his homily to lambast the wars that “the Herods of today fight every day to become greater, to occupy more space”.

He urged “Christians of the Holy Land, who are worried, and perhaps afraid by the reduction of our numbers, the inadequacy of our means, the insecurity that characterises our daily life,” to have courage in the troubled region.

Criticising Trump’s announcement, Pizzaballa insisted “Jerusalem is a city of peace, there is not peace if someone is excluded. Jerusalem should include, not exclude,” stressing the principle that Jerusalem is a city for both peoples and the three Abrahamic faiths.

“Jerusalem is our mother,” he said, and if one of her children “is missing the mother cannot be at peace, so we have to pray for the peace of Jerusalem,” the archbishop said in his homily in the presence of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas.

Trump’s decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has sparked almost daily protests in the Palestinian territories and put a damper on Christmas festivities.

Palestinian scouts played drums and bagpipes at celebrations in Bethlehem, but many tourists stayed away.

Hundreds gathered in the cold on Bethlehem’s Manger Square to watch the annual scout parade towards the Church of the Nativity, built over the spot where tradition says Mary gave birth to Jesus.

But the square was noticeably quieter following the violence between Palestinian protesters...
and the Israeli army in the past weeks.

Twelve Palestinians have been killed since Trump’s declaration, including a 19-year-old who died of his wounds on Sunday nine days after he was shot during a Gaza protest.

In the square, Nahil Banura, a Christian woman from Beit Sahur near Bethlehem, said Trump’s decision had made the run-up to Christmas “miserable”.

“People are only going out to vent,” she said.

**Sadness and joy**

The Israeli army officer in charge of the Bethlehem area said that while tensions had been high in the area following the Jerusalem announcement, he did not expect trouble at Christmas.

“We’ve reinforced our troops, and are ready for any scenario,” Lieutenant Colonel Benny Meir told AFP.

Israel seized east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed it, in moves never recognised by the international community.

Palestinians view east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, and interpreted Trump’s statement as rejecting their right to a capital in east Jerusalem, although the Americans deny this.

In a statement earlier, Abbas called on “world Christians to listen to the true voices of the indigenous Christians from the Holy Land... that strongly rejected the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital”.

Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, told AFP
that Christmas this year is a "mix of sadness and joy" because of the US decision on Jerusalem, which he called "the beating heart of Palestine". 

© AFP 2017.

Read: Would you like to attend a mass by Pope Francis during his Irish visit? Here's what people said...

Read: Archbishop says Pope Francis’ visit to Ireland will cost around €20 million

The footsteps of Joseph and Mary': Pope Francis urges Catholics not to ignore migrants' plight this Christmas

It is only now, in my thirty-second year that I realise – I really am up to my neck in this millennial world and sinking fast, writes Leah Quinn.

Potatoes are high in vitamin C, naturally fat-free, a source of fibre and potassium and low in sugar. They are also versatile and delicious, writes Michael Kelly.

Some women simply don’t have enough money to buy sanitary products so councils are piloting a scheme to distribute them in public buildings, writes Rebecca Moynihan.

The largest strike in Ireland’s history - 80,000 gardaí may walk out tomorrow. The strike is the largest since the Civil War. Why? The Department of Justice. 

The footsteps of Joseph and Mary: Pope Francis urges Catholics not to ignore migrants' plight this Christmas. 

The Body Coach is scarlet over the reaction to his dishes on last night’s Late Late. 

Hozier reminded the nation just how shameful it is be to labelled 'no craic'. 

Save or splurge: 10 of the chicest shirt dresses the highstreet has to offer. 

West Dublin gang using hailing apps to target older taxi drivers. 

Santa gets the all clear to enter Irish airspace. 

Senior traffic garda singles out gardaí he Man who ran at gardaí with knife after assaulting girlfriend gets partially suspended sentence. 

5 ways to know you’re dehydrated and why it even matters.

The largest strike in Ireland’s history - 80,000 gardaí may walk out tomorrow.

Man arrested after gardaí catch him driving at 200km/h in 100km/h zone. 

Two people killed in Here’s what’s happening in Dublin and Cork for Chinese New Year.

BREATH TESTS

COURTS

HEALTH

GARDAÍ

GARDAÍ

BLANCHARDSTOWN

The shop meant everything': Beloved local greengrocer shuts down after 55 years in business. 

Rescuers recover body of Spanish boy who fell down well.

Remains found on Donegal beach confirmed to be missing 72-year-old woman.

Brexit is poison - but there's still hope for prosperity when it comes to Irish tech.

Why Parkpnp's founder is changing his plans for the US – and opening a wine and 'cronut' bar.

'His heart is with Ireland' - Bayern Munich teenager Johansson commits international future.

'My Dad has always said, 'this is the land my children are going to prosper in’.

Opinion: It’s hard to survive as a 30-something in a millennial's world

From the Garden: One vegetable is essential to the Irish diet - so why not learn to grow it?

Opinion: Let’s eradicate period poverty by providing free sanitary products across the country.

Opinion: Let’s eradicate period poverty by providing free sanitary products across the country.

As it happened: Tipperary v Clare, Mayo v Roscommon, Dublin v Carlow - Saturday GAA match tracker.

‘His heart is with Ireland’ - Bayern Munich teenager Johansson commits international future.

Save or splurge: 10 of the chicest shirt dresses the highstreet has to offer.

The Body Coach is scarlet over the reaction to his dishes on last night’s Late Late.

Hozier reminded the nation just how shameful it is be to labelled 'no craic'.

Save or splurge: 10 of the chicest shirt dresses the highstreet has to offer.
Gardaí appeal for information about car used in west Dublin shooting

Former Liverpool midfielder Alex O'Hanlon agrees deal to join Shelbourne

believes aren’t issuing enough fines

'Significant concern' over lack of breath testing at scenes of fatal crashes

Man charged with possessing imitation firearm at family law court in December

Man jailed for eight-and-a-half years for sexual assault, exploitation and defilement of 13 year-old girl

the health service’s history looms': Talks to avoid nurses strike have collapsed

CervicalCheck support group says smear test delays are 'totally unacceptable'

single-vehicle collision in Monaghan

'The loss of a loved one is traumatic enough without this': People asked to report photos of fatal M50 crash

The footsteps of Joseph and Mary': Pope Francis urges Catholics not to ignore migrants' plight this Christmas