

Pope's words in Canada may have broader reach, official says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis' July trip to Canada was born out of his meetings with the nations' Indigenous people and was planned around encounters with them, and if the pope's words "have value elsewhere," like throughout the Americas, all the better, said the director of the Vatican press office.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, briefed reporters July 20 about details of the pope's visit to Canada July 24-29. He said the pope planned to deliver his nine speeches and homilies in Spanish during the trip.

Asked if the choice of Spanish was meant to send a message to other Indigenous peoples of North and South America, who often suffered the same forms of colonization, Bruni said Pope Francis would be speaking to the people he met, but he also knows that his words can offer solace to other Indigenous people and a challenge to the broader society.

Bruni also noted that more Canadians are likely to understand Spanish than Italian, and it would be easier to find translators from Spanish rather than Italian.

The trip to Canada will be Pope Francis' 37th foreign journey as pope and Canada will be the 56th country he has visited since his election in March 2013.

Pope Francis himself described the trip as a "penitential pilgrimage" to express, in person and on Canadian soil, his "indignation, sorrow and shame for all that these people suffered," Bruni said.

Much of the suffering occurred through forced attendance at

residential schools where attempts were made to uproot them from their languages, cultures and spiritualities, and where many students suffered emotional, physical and sexual abuse. Many of the schools were run by Catholic religious orders and institutions.

The main themes likely to be treated by the pope, Bruni said, include the impact of the colonialism of the past and of new forms of colonialism on Indigenous communities today as well as the desire of the Catholic Church to walk with the Indigenous communities on a path of truth-seeking, healing and reconciliation.

“These are some of the elements we may find in his words and gestures in the coming days,” Bruni said.

When representatives of Canada’s First Nations, and Inuit communities met Pope Francis at the Vatican in March and April, they asked him specifically for a formal repudiation of the “doctrine of discovery.” The phrase describes a collection of papal teachings, beginning in the 14th century, that encouraged explorers to colonize and claim the lands of any people who were not Christian, placing both the land and the people under the sovereignty of European Christian rulers.

The loss of the land, language, culture and spirituality of the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the foundation of the residential school system all can be traced to the doctrine, Indigenous leaders told reporters after their meetings with the pope.

Asked if the pope is expected to say something about the “doctrine of discovery” while in Canada, Bruni said, “a reflection is underway in the Holy See on the doctrine of discovery” and the study is nearing its conclusion. However, he said he is not certain that a statement will be completed before the papal trip ends or if the pope will speak about it while in Canada.

Given the close connections the Indigenous have to the land and to nature, Bruni said, Pope Francis also is likely to speak about care for the environment and climate change, particularly when he visits the Inuit in Iqaluit, Nunavit. The Arctic community already is dealing with the impact of global warming with the shrinking of glaciers, the thinning of sea ice, the thawing of permafrost thawing, coastal erosion and changes in the local wildlife.