

Praswida Dewi: Pope's Sincere Smile



March 19, 2018 is a day that will never be forgotten in the course of my life. Who would have thought me, Muslim women from the border region of Central Java with East Java can shake hands directly with the head of the Holy See of the Vatican as well as the leader of Catholics around the world.

Pope Francis or Pope Francis was the first Pope to come from outside Europe, Argentina, so no wonder my Argentine friend who was also present at the meeting seemed very happy. Thank you Romo Aloysius Budi Purnomo in Semarang and Padre Markus Solo at the Vatican who recommended me to be a non-Catholic religious representative from Indonesia to attend the 2018 Pre-Synodal Meeting in the Vatican, Rome, from 18 to 24 March 2018. I am honored to be eligible to contribute and share the experience of the Catholic youth in Indonesia, especially in their relationships with other faiths. An opportunity that at once meets with 300 youths from different countries. About 94% of them are Catholic.

As soon as heading into the Conference Hall, the Pope seemed to spread a sincere smile and accepted the invitation of the participants' selfie sitting on the middle side. In addition to the pleasure of sharing a smile turned out to Pope Francis is also happy to joke and even laugh also look sincere.

There is one thing that makes me speechless at that time. In some previous speakers, I saw on the table some treats or if only drinks are medium-sized glasses but that did not happen when Pope Francis became a speaker. He prefers to serve only mineral water in a small glass. A trivial thing, but from there I can see the simplicity of his side. Even when I shook his hand and said "Pope, I'm a Muslim delegation from Indonesia" he said "Yes" with a look of excitement and still gives me a sincere smile.

I highly appreciate the Holy See for having accepted me who is not this Catholic to look beyond the Vatican but also go inside and even explore the whole inner side of St. Peter's Basilica, the largest and most important Catholic Church in the world. Not only that. The guards at the Vatican and in various Basilicas and other places in the city of Rome have never questioned what my religion and my head scarf, even at the meeting place and in the lodgings I am still allowed to worship according to my religion and belief, when and wherever I want .

*Pope, I never dreamt in my life that a meeting with you would come true.
I thank God for that unforgettable moment.
I hope we could meet again someday.
Thank you Holy See, thank you Holy Father,
Thank you Coordinators and everyone who have made it possible.*

Praswida Dewi Kartika Maharani - Indonesia