



AFRICA
 APOSTOLIC JOURNEY MOROCCO POPE FRANCIS CATHOLIC CHURCH ISLAM

Pope Francis: In the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi -800 years later

The Catholic Church in Morocco has noted that, among other things, that for them, the visit of Pope Francis is symbolic because it marks the 800th anniversary of the encounter between St. Francis and Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall.

Paul Samasumo –Rabat, Morocco,

The visit of Pope Francis in Morocco coincides with the 800th anniversary of the encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and the Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall, who initiated the desire for dialogue and the establishment of harmonious relations between Catholicism and Islam. Another symbol that the Church in Morocco is drawing with this visit is that it coincides with the Jubilee of the 800 years of Franciscan presence in Morocco (1219 - 2019).

At the invitation of the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI and the Bishops of Morocco, Cristóbal López Romero, Archbishop of Rabat, and the Archbishop of Tangier, Santiago Agrelo Martínez, Pope is currently in Rabat for a weekend visit.

St Francis of Assisi encounters Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall

Eight hundred years ago, St. Francis of Assisi and his companion, Illuminatus, who it is said could speak 'some' Arabic set out to meet the Muslim Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall. He was the Sultan of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt:

Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall was a devout Muslim could have had St Francis of Assisi killed for trying to convert him. The Sultan spared the life of St Francis. It is not exactly known what St. Francis and the Sultan al-Malik al-K'mall discussed, but historians say Francis returned home a changed man and impressed about his experience with the Sultan.

The Catholic Church in Morocco has a long and ancient history

In a media briefing about the visit of Pope Francis to Rabat, Père Daniel Nourissat of the Archdiocese of Rabat, says the presence of Christianity in North Africa goes back to the end of the Second Century. There are ancient traces of Christianity, before the arrival of Islam, in places such as Tangier and others. After the establishment of Islam in the Maghreb, small Christian communities survived until the thirteenth century, in some areas, despite the gradual disappearance of the ecclesiastic hierarchy.

In 1219, during St. Francis of Assisi's very lifetime, the first Franciscans entered Morocco, at the Sultan of Marrakech's request, to ensure his captives' would continue to have the freedom of worship. In 1225, the Holy See appointed for the territories under Almohad's dominion, a Dominican Bishop. From the fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century, Spanish missionaries continued to exercise their apostolate among Christian captives.

In 1955 there were 200 Christian Churches in Morocco

Following the rapid expansion of the Catholic Church, in 1923 Pope Pius XI created two Apostolic Vicariates: One in Rabat, for the French Protectorate zone, and another in Tangier, for the Spanish Protectorate zone and the Tangier international zone. Resident General Hubert Lyautey, a French Army general and colonial administrator, made sure that the Church respected Morocco's "protectorate" status and did not seek to make Muslims become Christians.

In 1955, there were 200 Christian Churches for the 500,000 Europeans who were in Morocco.

Pope Saint John Paul II meets 80 000 young Moroccans

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were strong initiatives concerning Inter-religious dialogue. All these initiatives eventually culminated in the historic event for the Church in Morocco and the Islamic-Christian dialogue when Pope Saint John Paul II visited Casablanca on 19 August 1985. At that event, Pope Saint John Paul II addressed a memorable meeting, in Casablanca, of 80,000 young Moroccans at the Mohammed V stadium.

Nevertheless, the years 1975 to 1990 also saw the massive departure of Christians from Morocco as well as with the departure of many religious congregations and the closing down of many Churches, sometimes demolished or sold. Many were mostly handed over to the State. The Dioceses and the Moroccan authorities ensured that these Churches and institutions became a cultural or community space. Twelve boarding schools for Catholic children became Moroccan schools following the Moroccan school system.

The Protestant also has its history

The Protestant Church also has its own history in Morocco. The first Protestant Church having been founded in 1874 in Essaouira/Mogador. By the middle of the 19th century, an Anglican community was established, building a non-Muslim cemetery around 1850 and erecting, in 1906 in Casablanca, the Saint John's church, which still exists.

In 1913, the first organised French Protestant community was formed in Casablanca.

The status of the Catholic Church in Morocco

In 1984, King Hassan II, recalling the spirit of brotherly understanding that had always characterised the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Morocco, gave to the Catholic Church of Morocco its status. By Royal Dahir (that is, a provision with legislative force), allowed the Catholic Church to exercise its spiritual mission publicly and freely.

Although numbering only about 33 0000, the Catholic Church in Morocco, today, is very active and includes a growing number of Christians mostly from sub-Saharan countries of Africa.

Thank you for reading our article. You can keep up-to-date by subscribing to our daily newsletter. [Just click here](#)

YOUR CONTRIBUTION FOR A GREAT MISSION: SUPPORT US IN BRINGING THE POPE'S WORDS INTO EVERY HOME



Topics APOSTOLIC JOURNEY MOROCCO POPE FRANCIS CATHOLIC CHURCH ISLAM

31 March 2019, 11:51

Send Print Facebook X WhatsApp

ABENÇÓES ANGOLA 2026
 PAPA LEÃO XIV
 PERCORRER DA ESPERANÇA, RECONCILIAR E PAZ
 18 A 21 ABRIL
 VIAGEM APOSTÓLICA A ANGOLA
 19-04-2026 16:35
Angola, Luanda, Farewell by local Civil Authorities
 Angola, from Luanda "4 de Fevereiro" International Airport, Farewell by local Civil Authorities
 More upcoming events:
 19-04-2026 17:15
 Angola, Muxima, Welcome by local Civil Authorities
 19-04-2026 17:25
 Angola, Muxima, Recitation of the Holy Rosary
 19-04-2026 18:35
 Angola, Muxima, Farewell by local Civil Authorities



LISTEN TO OUR PODCASTS

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTERS
 To get the latest news

ANGELUS

PAPAL AUDIENCES

DAILY READINGS

SAINT OF THE DAY

YOUR CONTRIBUTION FOR A GREAT MISSION

POPE'S ACTIVITIES

Angelus
 General Audiences

OUR FAITH

Word of the day
 Saints
 Liturgical Feasts
 Prayers

USEFUL INFORMATION

About us
 Contacts
 Frequently asked questions
 Legal Notes
 Privacy Policy
 Cookie Policy

OTHER SITES

Vatican.va
 L'Osservatore Romano
 Vaticanstate.va
 Peter's Pence
 Photo

OUR CHANNELS

Podcast
 Programs
 Short Waves
 Professional services
 Newsletter

