

Pope Francis departs on 32nd Apostolic Journey abroad

Pope Francis sets off on his Apostolic Journey to Thailand and Japan aboard the papal plane on Tuesday evening.

By Devin Watkins

The papal plane departed from Rome's Fiumicino airport at around 7:15 PM.

It is scheduled to touch down in the Thai capital of Bangkok at 12:30 PM local time (6:30 AM Rome time).

As is customary, one Vatican employee was chosen to accompany the Pope on his Apostolic Journey. The honor for this trip was given to Antonino Enea, a calligrapher at the Secretariat of State.

Before departing from the Casa Santa Marta, Pope Francis met briefly with a group of 10 elderly people assisted by the Little Sisters of the Poor at the Church of St Peter in Chains.

First leg: Thailand

Pope Francis will be in Thailand until Saturday, and follows in the footsteps of Pope St John Paul II, who visited in May 1984.

Catholics number around 325,000 in Thailand, or 0.59% of the population. Some 80% of Catholics are Thai, with immigrants accounting for a rising portion of the faithful.

Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin says Pope Francis will [likely encourage Christians to be missionary disciples](#), as the Church celebrates 350 years since the first Jesuit missionaries proclaimed the Gospel there.

Second leg: Japan

On Saturday, Pope Francis will travel to Japan for a 4-day visit, from Saturday until Tuesday.

Catholics make up only 0.42% of the population, or around 600,000 faithful. Even here, migrant workers make up an [increasing portion of the Catholic population](#), as Japan eases its immigration laws.

The Pope is expected to encourage efforts toward denuclearization, especially during his whirlwind visit to both Nagasaki and Hiroshima on Sunday.

He returns to Rome on Tuesday, 26 November.