



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PREFECTS OF VARIOUS ITALIAN CITIES

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 6 February 2015*

[Multimedia]

Mr Minister, Distinguished Prefects,

I am pleased to welcome all of you, who have the delicate task of manifesting throughout the territory of Italy the authority of the Central Government, particularly with regard to enforcing order and public safety. I thank the Hon. Minister of the Interior for his courteous words to me on your behalf.

Your institution, through its diverse competencies, its long history of experience and widespread presence in the local communities, is an important factor of cohesion — as the Minister rightly mentioned —, coordinating the local administrative bodies as required by the centre. At the same time under appropriate conditions it reports situations of particular difficulty or marginality to the central authorities, giving voice to opinions that would otherwise risk passing unheard.

It is a service which entails tenacious dedication to duty, an in-depth knowledge of the issues, combined with the necessary flexibility to address the countless practical cases that come up, each of which is singular.

In these years characterized by the phenomenon of migration, linked to the escalation of violent conflicts in the world and their tragic consequences for the people and the economies of so many countries, prefectorial surveillance demands particular sensitivity with regard to immigration. The exercise of this duty entails the need to identify in the daily management of situations, often urgent, the correct application of norms, to guarantee, along with the correct observance of the law and the other provisions in force, scrupulous respect for the fundamental rights of every human being. And here, echoing what the Minister said, I would like to express profound gratitude to you for the efforts which you Prefects make in coordinating the reception of thousands of men, women

and children arriving on Italy's shores.

On this subject, as on many others, fruitful cooperation among Prefectures, Dioceses and parishes is of significant help. This cooperation, while respecting the individual competencies, deserves to be strengthened and enhanced. The Church, being a divine and human entity, works within society by serving people on the basis of Christ's teaching and, wishing to carry out her educational and charitable mission in sincere cooperation with the State institutions for the advancement of man and the good of the country, is pleased to find in the Prefectures one of the areas in which this synergy actually happens for the good of all citizens.

On the other hand, to ensure the full effectiveness of your task of linking, listening and searching for solutions suited to the circumstances, in harmony with other local and central institutions, a specific exercise of authority is essential, one rooted in obedience and has the single noble purpose of service.

Obedience of the law and the criteria of humanity which inform it and loyalty to institutions constitute the indispensable framework in which your service is carried out. This attitude favours the acquisition of that specific *habitus* which renders a person able to assume great responsibilities. The crisis of authority that our society is experiencing in different sectors, public as well as private, with far-reaching consequences, especially with regard to educating the young generations, in fact has among its causes the very lack of this fundamental disposition of obedience, of listening, of patience.

The exercise of authority, moreover, always aims at achieving the common good, finding deepest success and *raison d'être* and its effective success precisely in placing it at the service of those to whom its power is directed, in imitation of the Lord Jesus, who came among us as One who serves (cf. Lk 22:27).

The more the citizens see that the public administration generously tries to respond to their needs and protect their rights, the more disposed they will be to observe its recommendations in an active and orderly spirit of cooperation and respect.

Therefore, you are called to make available your professionalism and your humanity, your knowledge and your prudence, without discouragement or pessimism, knowing, however, that you are not faced with abstract issues, but with the actual faces of men and women with their problems and their hopes, which in these years of uncertainty and economic difficulty are even more urgent. I am certain that your sense of duty and awareness of the importance of your role will help you to address your future tasks in the best way, with dedication and in a spirit of sacrifice.

With these wishes, as I invoke upon you the intercession of your Patron St Ambrose, I ask you to please pray for me and I bless you from my heart. Thank you.

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