



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO VERONA

MEETING WITH THE POLICE PRISON OFFICERS, DETAINEES AND VOLUNTEERS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Montorio Prison (Verona)

Saturday, 18 May 2024

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank the Director for her welcome and sense of humour! Smiling is very good for us. I thank you all for the warmth, cheer and affection you show me. A greeting also goes to all those who work in this institution: the custodial officers, educators, healthcare workers, administrative staff, and volunteers. I also would like to greet all those who are looking on from the windows: a greeting to all of you! I was very keen to meet you all together.

For me, entering a prison is always an important moment because prison is a place of great humanity. Yes, it is a place of great humanity. Humanity that is tested, sometimes burdened by difficulties, guilt, judgments, misunderstandings, and suffering, but at the same time full of strength, a desire for forgiveness, and the will to redeem oneself, as Duarte said in his discourse.

And in this humanity, here, in all of you, in all of us, Christ's face is present today, the face of the God of mercy and forgiveness. Do not forget this: God forgives everything and he forgives always, in this humanity here, in all of you — this way of looking at the God of mercy.

We know about the situation of prisons, often overcrowded — even in my country — with

consequent tensions and hardships. This is why I want to tell you that I am close to you, and I renew my appeal, especially to those who can take action in this area, to continue working for the improvement of prison life. A woman who worked in prisons and had a good relationship with the inmates — in a women's prison — once told me that she was a devotee of a saint. "But which saint?". — "Holy Door". — "Why?". — "It is the door of hope". All of you should look at this door of hope. There is no human life without a horizon. Please do not lose the horizons that you will be able to see through that door of hope.

Following the news of your institution, with sorrow, I learned that unfortunately, here, recently, some people, in an extreme gesture, ended their lives. This is a terrible act, one that only unsustainable despair and pain can lead to. Therefore, while I join in prayer with the families and all of you, I want to invite you not to give in to discouragement. Life is always worth living, and there is always hope for the future, even when everything seems to be draining away. Our existence, the existence of each of us, is important, it is a unique gift for us and for others, for everyone, and especially for God, who never abandons us, and who indeed knows how to listen, rejoice, and weep with us. With Him by our side, we can overcome despair. And like the Director said, God is one: our cultures have taught us to call him by a name, a different one, and to find him in different ways, but it is the same father of us all. He is one. And all religions, all cultures, look to the one God in different ways. He never abandons us. With him at our side we can overcome despair and live each moment as the right time to start again. To start again. There is a beautiful song from the Piemonte region that I will try to translate into Italian. It goes like this — the Alpini sing it — "In the art of ascending, what matters is not not to fall, but to not remain fallen". And to all those who work in this prison, even as volunteers, to family members, to all of us, I say one thing: There is only one occasion when it is right to look at a person from the top down: to help them up.

Therefore, in the worst moments, let us not close in on ourselves: let us talk to God about our pain and help each other to bear it, among companions on the journey and with the good people we find by our side. It is not weakness to ask for help: let us do it with humility and trust. We all need each other, and we all have the right to hope, beyond any history and any mistake or failure. Hope is a right that never disappoints. Never.

In a few months, the Holy Year will begin: a year of conversion, renewal, and liberation for the whole Church; a year of mercy, in which to lay down the burden of the past and renew momentum towards the future; in which to celebrate the possibility of change, to be and, where necessary, to return to being truly ourselves, giving our very best. May this also be a sign that helps us stand up again and confidently take control of our life, every day.

Dear friends, thank you for this meeting. I will tell you the truth: it is good for me. You are good for me. Thank you! Let us continue to walk together because love unites us beyond any kind of distance. I remember you in my prayers, and I ask you, please, to pray for me too: for me, not

against me! Pray for me. And do not forget: “In the art of ascending, what matters is not not to fall, but to not remain fallen”. Thank you.

After the blessing, the Holy Father said:

And now I will give a gift to the prison. I will give it to the director. This gift... I thought of a virtue that God has, and which we forget, don't we? Because God has three principal virtues: closeness, compassion and tenderness. God is close to all of us, God is compassionate, and God is tender. And I thought about tenderness — we don't talk much about tenderness — and I thought of this gift: Our Lady with Child, which is indeed a gesture of tenderness. And I also thought that the figure of Mary is a figure common to both Christianity and Islam, she is a common figure, she unites us all.

Now I would like to give you the blessing, but I will give it in silence; in this way each person receives it from God in the way that he or she believes. A minute of silence, and I will give the blessing to you all.

May the Lord bless you, help you always to keep going forward, comfort you in sadness and be your companion in joy. Amen.

Enjoy your lunch, and Arrivederci!

L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English, Fifty-seventh year, number 21, Friday, 24 May 2024, p. 12.
