



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE BOLLETTINO

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Pastoral visit of the Holy Father Francis to the archdiocese of Milan: Meeting with the residents of the Forlanini quarter – “White Houses”

At 7.15 this morning the Holy Father Francis departed by air from Rome Fiumicino airport for his pastoral visit to the archdiocese of Milan.

Upon arrival at Milan Linate airport, the Pope was greeted by His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola, archbishop of Milan; the Honorable Roberto Maroni, president of the Lombardy region; Luciana Lamorgese, prefect of Milan; Giuseppe Sala, mayor of Milan; Paolo Micheli, mayor of Segrate; and other figures.

The Holy Father then visited the Forlanini quarter – the “White Houses” of Via Salomone where, at 8.38, he was received by Don Augusto Bonora, parish priest of San Galdino.

Pope Francis subsequently visited various families in their respective apartments, and addressed greetings to residents in the square of the “White Houses”. He went on to meet representatives of Rom, Muslim and immigrant families, and inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

The following are the words the Holy Father addressed to residents in the square of the “White Houses”:

Holy Father's greeting

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Thank you for your very warm welcome! Thank you, thank you very much. You have welcomed me upon entry to Milan, and this is a great gift for me: to enter the city meeting faces, families, a community.

And thank you for the two special gifts that you have given me.

The first is this stole, a typical priestly sign, that touches me in a special way because it reminds me that here I come among you as a priest, I enter Milan as a priest. You did not buy this stole ready made; it was created here, it was woven by some of you, in the traditional way. This makes it much more valuable; and it recalls that the Christian priest is chosen by the people and in the service of the people; my priesthood, like that of your parish priest and other priests who work here, is a gift of Christ, but it is “woven” from you, our people, with your faith, your labours, your prayers, your tears ... This I see in the sign of the stole. The priesthood is a gift from Christ, but “woven” by you, and I see this in this sign.

Then, you have given me this image of your *Madonnina*: the way it was and as it is now after restoration. Thank you! I know that in Milan the *Madonnina* welcomes me, at the top of the Duomo; but thanks to your gift she already greets me from here, at the entrance. And this is important, because it reminds me of the kindness of Mary, who runs to meet Elizabeth. It is the concern and solicitude of the Church, who does not remain in the centre waiting, but reaches out to all, in the peripheries, who also goes out towards non-Christians, even to non-believers, and takes Jesus to everyone; He Who is God’s love made flesh, Who gives meaning to our lives and saves us from evil. And Our Lady comes towards us not to proselytize, no! But to accompany us in the path of our life; and also the fact that it was the *Madonnina* who awaited me at the entry to Milan reminded me of when as children we returned from school and there was our mother at the door waiting for us. Our Lady is a mother! And she always arrives first, she goes ahead to welcome us, to await us. Thank you for this! And the fact of the restoration is meaningful too: your *Madonnina* has been restored, just as the Church always needs to be “restored”, because she is made by us, We Who are sinners, all of us, we are sinners. Let us allow ourselves to be restored by God, by His mercy. Let us be cleansed in the heart, especially at this time of Lent. Our Lady is without sin and does not need restoration, but the statue does, and in this way as a Mother she teaches us to let ourselves be cleansed by God’s mercy, to bear witness to Jesus’ holiness. And fraternally speaking, a good Confession is good for us all. But I also ask confessors to be merciful.

Many thanks for these gifts! And above all, thank you for being here, for your welcome and your prayer that accompanies me in my entry to Milan. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady keep you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. And now, let us pray to Our Lady. And goodbye!

At the end of the visit to the Forlanini quarter – “White Houses”, the Holy Father transferred by car to the Duomo of Milan, to meet with priests and consecrated persons.