

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 231205d

Tuesday 05.12.2023

Press Conference “Actions of a social nature of the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican in preparation for the Jubilee”

Today, at 12.30, the press conference “Actions of a social nature of the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican in preparation for the Jubilee” was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, O.F.M. Conv., archpriest of the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican, vicar general of His Holiness for Vatican City State, and president of the Fabric of Saint Peter; Pres. Giovanni Russo, head of the Department of Prison Administration of the Ministry of Justice of the Italian Republic; Dr. Flavia Filippi, founder and president of the “Second Chance” Association; and Dr. Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori, founder and president of the “*Casa dello Spirito e delle Arti*” (“House of the Spirits and the Arts”) Foundation.

The following are some of their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Mauro Gambetti

According to Jewish tradition, the jubilee fell at the end of seven weeks of years, the fiftieth year, and had various social and economic implications.

In the jubilee, disgraced Jews who had become “slaves” to their brothers to repay debts were freed and property that had been sold due to financial difficulties was returned to the original owners. Moreover, in that year - as in every seven years - the land was not cultivated, to allow it to regenerate.

It was a utopian form of social justice, compassion and respect for the land. Two absolute principles were thus united: the dignity of each person - expressed by the restitution of freedom and land - and the greatness and goodness of God, who created free people and gave them the land to live in peace and abundance.

After all, the jubilee was a memorial of the liberation of the people from slavery in Egypt and their entry into the promised land. Thus, through laws that promoted a spirit of solidarity, the dream of overcoming misery, eliminating injustice, giving everyone at least a second chance was cultivated.

Three words resonate in the Jubilee year. Gratitude, justice, forgiveness.

Gratitude. We live in a world we have not given ourselves; no one has made themselves, by their own labour or ingenuity. Each of us is a gift and everything we use or have temporary possession of has its origin in gratuitousness. It is evidence. One of the consequences of this is that before thinking about the remuneration to be received, one must make an effort to give back what has been received as a gift (on loan), making one's "talent" and "talents" available to others. This is the clearest and most powerful soul of any business and market activity, because it respects everyone, values everyone and builds social friendship.

Justice. The land we live in is a good land, a land given, but not only to oneself. To everyone. Therefore, social inequalities, inequalities, must be reduced as much as possible, where not completely eliminated. Of course, destitute people will never be lacking, but we must fight against poverty - economic, cultural, spiritual - to allow everyone and everyone to have equal opportunities to grow and enjoy the goods of earth and heaven.

Forgiveness is both the engine and the fuel of gratuitousness and justice. It is necessary to be peacemakers in one's environment, starting with the family environment, by practising forgiveness. For example, responding with meekness to offensive words, making gestures of reconciliation where there is division, doing good to those who pose as enemies are some of the attitudes that build peace, destroy the potential of evil and transform it into good.

From these convictions and the collaboration with the Department of Prison Administration of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Italy, with the *Casa dello Spirito e delle Arti* ("House of the Spirits and the Arts") Foundation and with the *Second Chance* Association, come the social projects of the Basilica that will be illustrated today.

Alongside these projects, on the evening of 9 December, on the occasion of the lighting of the tree and the blessing of the Greccio Nativity display in Saint Peter's Square, the Parish of Saint Peter's is organizing, together with the Dicastery for Charity and with the support of the Governorate, a dinner with homeless people.

In preparation for the Jubilee we have also extended the times for prayer in the Basilica, adding the weekly evening Eucharistic Adoration at the Altar of Confession to Saturdays at 21.00.

The Jubilee can only be lived by continually drawing on the spiritual life, which enables us to have a simple and humble gaze and an open heart to welcome others, those who are different, because we recognize them as so similar to ourselves in the mysterious depths of our being that we feel at one with them.

Those who drink from the fountains of the spirit see the fear of death disappear from their hearts and know how to renounce their possessions and their own reasons, how to be open to forgiveness, to give generously, to do good to those who do us harm, to submit to all out of love.

In this we will be guided by Peter's testimony during the cycle of *Lectio Petri*, already started by the *Fratelli tutti* Foundation in collaboration with the Courtyard of the Gentiles.

Peter understood that Jesus defeated evil and death not because he did not feel all its fierce and unjust violence, but because he responded only with love, and all the evil in history melted away like snow in the sun, leaving only peace, life and joy, condensed in the greeting of the Risen One: *shalom*. And he followed it to the end.

Intervention of Dr. Flavia Filippi

I am very grateful to His Eminence Cardinal Gambetti for his openness to this project, which is bringing ferment to penal institutions and giving hope to those who have been searching for it in vain for some time. The arrival at the Vatican of the first inmate of *Second Chance*, last 1 September at 6.55, was an unforgettable moment. His astonished smile as he ran towards the entrance of the Holy Office to arrive punctually at 7 o'clock marks the start of a journey that began a year and a half ago thanks to the Cardinal and the Fabric of Saint Peter. Several selection interviews are in progress for other positions at the Fabric. We have already returned to *Rebibbia* and *Regina Coeli* to evaluate some candidates. The project is spreading with impressive speed: at the beginning, *Second Chance* only aimed at the reintegration of prisoners into work, but the Association has quickly become a point of reference for the prison population. At our address (info@secondachance.net) we receive continuous requests from inmates, family members, lawyers, but also from prison workers who ask us to run training courses, to provide pizza ovens and gym equipment, to try to improve the sports infrastructure, to organize sporting, cultural and musical events. The primary request, however, is to find opportunities for the many inmates who are in the right legal position to work outside, where labour shortages are chronic in several sectors, especially in construction and catering. But inmates also write to us to dispel their loneliness, for an answer or a visit, to ask if they can count on us. And when they go on parole, they always phone us, sometimes stopping by to say hello.

Second Chance's intention is to expand, consolidate, and construct throughout the country this very small network which, not counting on dedicated personnel, has not yet been able to emerge from its small-scale status. Finding work contracts is an immense effort. Emails, phone calls, and business cards left in bars, restaurants, shops, garages, factories, construction, agricultural, and graphics companies are not enough. To find an unprejudiced entrepreneur willing to come to the prison with us to assess manpower, and disinterested in the long bureaucratic times that pass before a prisoner is authorized to work outside, patience, sensitivity, heart, time are needed. A large, motivated and well-equipped team is needed. I hope to be able to form it soon.

Intervention of Dr. Arnoldo Mosca Mondadori

When I went to Lampedusa and saw the boats with migrants arriving, boats that were being destroyed and disposed of as "special waste", I thought that the wood could become a memory of the history of those people fleeing war and poverty.

So, in 2021 we asked the Italian government that the wood from the boats, instead of being destroyed, could be reused. And here we are with the Rosaries of the Sea: crosses are made from keels by prisoners. The crosses then arrive from the prison together with the beads, also made from the same wood, and in a room provided by Saint Peter's Basilica two refugee people assemble the Rosaries. I am very grateful to Saint Peter's Basilica for welcoming these people every morning, who come every day to work at Saint Peter's and to find autonomy and dignity here. So, on the one hand we try, with this project called "Metamorphosis", to ensure that many young people, by receiving a rosary, can learn about the contemporary drama of migrants. On the other hand, we give work in prisons, in the penitentiary institutes of *Opera*, *Monza*, *Rebibbia* and *Secondigliano*, where there are various lutheries and carpentry workshops, to emphasize the importance of Article 27 of the Italian Constitution, according to which punishment must aim at the "re-education of the condemned person".

Coordinating the work of the workshops where the rosaries are made is a person who is here, and his name is Erjugen. Violins are also made from boat wood in Milan's *Opera* prison, and Erjugen was one of the first violin makers: we met thirteen years ago, in the *Opera* prison itself.

We accompanied him on his journey and now as a free man, with his name tag marked "teacher", he goes to coordinate the work of the inmates, and soon he will be here in the Fabric of Saint Peter to collaborate in this workshop too, together with the carpenter Stefano, a constant presence together with the two refugee women, Suzanne and Ana Maria. Thank you.