SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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Apostolic Trip of the Holy Father Francis to Chile and Peru (15-22 January 2018) – Visit to the "Female Central Penitentiary" of Santiago

Visit to the "Female Central Penitentiary" of Santiago

In the afternoon, after leaving the apostolic nunciature, the Holy Father transferred by car to the "Female Central Penitentiary" of Santiago.

Upon arrival, at 16.00 (20.00 in Rome), the Pope was received near the Chapel by the Commander of the prison and by the five chaplains. After the floral tribute from two detainees with their children, Pope Francis proceeded to the Centre's gymnasium where he was awaited by the nun responsible for pastoral care and a representation of detainees.

After a brief welcome address from the head of pastoral care, the testimony of a detainee and a performance of a hymn by the prison choir, the Holy Father addressed those present.

After the exchange of gifts and a photograph with the prison guards, the Pope transferred by car to Santiago Cathedral.

The following is the Pope's address during his visit to the "Female Central Penitentiary" of Santiago:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for what you have done and thank you for giving me this opportunity to visit you. For me it is important to share this time with you and draw closer to our many brothers and sisters presently deprived of their freedom. Thank you, Sister Nelly, for your kind words and especially for *testifying that life always triumphs over death, always*. Thank you, Janeth, for coming forward and sharing your hurt with all of us, and for your courageous request for forgiveness. How much we all have to learn from your act of courage and

humility! I quote your words: “We ask forgiveness from all those whom we have harmed by our misdeeds”. I thank you for reminding us that without this attitude we lose our humanity, all of us need to ask forgiveness, me first of all, all of us, that is what makes us human. Without this attitude of asking forgiveness, we forget that we did wrong and that we can make mistakes and that every day is an invitation to start over, one way or another.

I also think of the words of Jesus: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone” (*Jn* 8:7). And do you know what I tend to do in my homilies when I speak about all of us having something inside either due to weakness or because we fall or because we hide it well? I tell the people: Let’s see, we are all sinners, we all have sins. I don’t know, is there anyone here without sin? Raise you hand. No one dares raise their hand. Jesus asks us to leave behind the simplistic way of thinking that divides reality into good and bad, and to enter into that other mindset that recognizes our weaknesses, limitations and even sins, and thus helps us to keep moving forward.

As I came in, some mothers met me with their children. They welcomed me, and their welcome can nicely be expressed in two words: *mother and children*.

Mother. Many of you are mothers and you know what it means to bring a new life into the world. You were able to “take upon yourself” a new life and bring it to birth. Motherhood is not, and never will be a problem. It is a gift, and one of the most wonderful gifts you can ever have. Today you face a very real challenge: you also have to care for that life. You are asked to care for the future. To make it grow and to help it to develop. Not just for yourselves, but for your children and for society as a whole. As women, you have an incredible ability to adapt to new circumstances and move forward. Today I appeal to that ability to bring forth the future that is alive in each one of you. That ability enables you to resist everything that might rob you of your identity and end up by killing your hope. None of us are things, we are all persons and as such we have the dimension of hope. Let us not be robbed of our identity. I am not a number, I am not prisoner with a given number, I have a name and I have the ability to bring forth hope, because I want to give birth to hope.

Janeth was right: losing our freedom does not mean *losing our dreams and hopes*. This is true, it is very painful, but this does not mean losing hope, nor losing the ability to dream. Losing our freedom is not the same thing as losing our dignity, it is not the same thing. Dignity must not be touched, it must be cared for, protected, and shown tenderness. No one must be deprived of dignity. You are deprived of freedom. That is why we need to reject all those petty clichés that tell us we can’t change, that it’s not worth trying, that nothing will make a difference. As the Argentinean Tango says: “Go ahead, keep it up, we’ll all meet there in hell”. It’s not true that we cannot make a difference. No, dear sisters! Some things do make a difference! All those efforts we make to build for a better future – even if often it seems they just go down the drain – all of them will surely bear fruit and be rewarded.

The second word is *children*. Children are our strength, our future, our incentive. They are a living reminder that life has to be lived for the future, not remain in the past. Today your freedom has been taken away, but that is not the last word. Not at all! Keep looking forward. Look ahead to the day when you will return to life in society. A prison sentence without a future is not a human sentence, it is a torture. Every sentence being lived out to pay a debt to society must have a perspective, that is it must have the horizon of reintegration and preparation for being reintegrated. This is something you must demand of society. Always have this outlook, look forwards, towards reintegration into today’s society. For this reason, I applaud and encourage every effort to spread and support projects like *Espacio Mandela* and the *Fundación Mujer levántate*.

The name of that Foundation makes me think of the Gospel passage where people laughed at Jesus because he said that the daughter of the synagogue leader wasn’t dead, but only asleep. They laughed at him. Jesus showed us how to meet that kind of derision: he went straight to her room, took her by the hand and said: “Little girl, get up!” (*Mk* 5:41). For all, the girl was dead, but for Jesus, not so. Projects like those I mentioned are a living sign of this Jesus, who enters into each of our homes, pays no attention to ridicule and never gives up. He takes us by the hand and tells us to “get up”. It is wonderful that so many Christians and people of good will, that there are people of different beliefs in life or who have no religion but show good will, who follow in the footsteps of Jesus and decide to come here to be a sign of that outstretched hand us that lifts us up. I ask you: “Get up”.

Always get up.

We all know that, sadly, a jail sentence can be thought of or reduced to the idea of a punishment, offering no opportunities for personal growth. This is what I was explaining about hope, about looking forwards, generating processes of reintegration. This must be your dream: reintegration. If the path is long, do your best to make it shorter, but always with the idea of reintegration. Society has an obligation to provide for your reintegration, for all of you. When I say this, I mean to reintegrate each of you in your own personal way. One will do it one way, another will do it in a different way. One will take more time, another less. But it is always a person who is being reintegrated. Please have this firmly in your minds and demand it. This is what it means to generate a process. On the contrary, those initiatives that offer job training and help to rebuild relationships are signs of hope for the future. Let us help them to grow. Public order must not be reduced to stronger security measures, but should be concerned primarily with preventive measures, such as work, education, and greater community involvement.

With these thought I want to bless all of you and also greet the pastoral workers, volunteers and professional personnel, especially the police officers and their families. I pray for you. Your work is sensitive and complex, and so I ask you, the authorities, to try to provide the conditions needed to carry out your work with dignity. A dignity that engenders dignity. Dignity is contagious, more so than the flu. Dignity is contagious, dignity engenders dignity.

Mary is our Mother and we are her children, you are her daughters. We ask her to intercede for you, for each of your children and your dear ones. May she cover you with her mantle. And I ask you, please, pray for me because I need it. Thank you.