SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the participants in the Pilgrimages from the dioceses of Bologna and Cesena-Sarsina

At midday today, in Saint Peter's Square, the Holy Father Francis met with the participants in the pilgrimages from the dioceses of Bologna and Cesena-Sarsina, accompanied by their respective bishops.

The following is the Pope's address to pilgrims and faithful:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all with affection. Thank you for your celebratory presence! With this visit to the tomb of Peter you reciprocate my visit to your diocesan communities on 1 October last year. I am very grateful for this.

I greet the archbishop of Bologna, Msgr. Matteo Zuppi, and the bishop of Cesena-Sarsina, Msgr. Douglas Regattieri, who were so thoughtful during my visit. I thank you, dear brothers, for your words that revive in me the memory of that day. I welcome the civil authorities present here, as well as the priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful, with a special thought for all those who join spiritually in this pilgrimage, in particular the sick and the suffering.

I conserve a keen memory of those encounters I experienced in your cities. I do not forget the welcome you reserved to me and the moments of faith and prayer we have shared, in which faithful participated from every part of your respective dioceses. It was a gift of providence to confirm and strengthen the meaning of faith and belonging to the Church, which asks necessarily to be translated into attitudes and gestures of charity, especially towards the most fragile. Our bishops have underlined how my pastoral visit has been a reason for renewed effort on the part of all the members of your communities. I thank God for this and I urge you to continue with courage on the journey you have undertaken.

In the city of Cesena we commemorated the third centenary of the birth of Pope Pius VI, with a thought also for Pius VII. The memory of those two bishops of Rome, both from Cesena, constituted for you who form this diocesan community a favourable occasion to reflect on the journey of evangelization taken until today and on the new missionary objectives that await you. Heirs of these and other important figures of pastors and evangelizes, you are called to continue on this same road, making generous efforts to proclaim the Gospel to your fellow citizens and showing with works, which must not necessarily be great. Christians are a leaven of love, of fraternity, of hope, with many small daily gestures.

The occasion of the visit to Bologna was offered, as you well know, by the conclusion of the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress. The fervour created by that ecclesial event, which gathered many people around the Eucharistic Jesus, may extend over time, not fading but instead increasing and bearing fruit, leaving an indelible imprint on the journey of faith of your Christian community. As I recalled in the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, “Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community” (142). Indeed, the Eucharist makes the Church, aggregates her and unites her in a bond of love and hope. The Lord Jesus instituted her so that we may remain in Him and form one body: from being foreign and indifferent to one another we become united and brothers.

The Eucharist reconciles us and unites us, because it nourishes community relations and encourages attitudes of generosity, of forgiveness, of trust in our neighbour, of gratitude. The Eucharist, which means “thanksgiving”, makes us feel the need to give thanks: it makes us understand that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (*Acts* 20: 35), and it educates us to give primacy to love and practice justice in its complete form which is mercy; to always be able to thank, even when we receive what is due to us. Eucharistic worship also teaches us the right order of values: not to put earthly realities first, but rather celestial goods; to be hungry not only for material food, but also for that which “lasts for eternal life” (*Jn* 6: 27).

Dear brothers and sisters, the men and women of our time need to encounter Jesus Christ: He is the road that leads to the Father; He is the Gospel of hope and love that makes us capable of going as far as to give ourselves. This is our mission, which is both responsibility and joy, legacy of salvation and gift to share. It requires generous willingness, the renunciation of the self and trustful abandonment to divine will. It means following an itinerary of holiness to answer with courage to Jesus’ call, each person according to his own special charism. “A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for ‘this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 *Thess*, 4: 3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel” (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 19).

I encourage you to make resonate in your communities the call to holiness that regards every baptized person and every condition of life. Holiness consists in the complete fulfilment of every aspiration of the human heart. It is a path that starts at the baptismal font and leads to Heaven, and is implemented day by day, welcoming the Gospel into real life. With this commitment and with this missionary zeal, destined to give new impulse to evangelization in our dioceses you will give a concrete response to the exhortations I addressed to you during my visit. Do not tire of seeking God and His Kingdom above every other thing, and of engaging in service to your brothers, always in a style of simplicity and fraternity. The Virgin Mary, “the saint among the saints, blessed above all others, she [who] teaches us the way of holiness and walks ever at our side” (*ibid.*, 176), be the sure point of reference in your pastoral and missionary itinerary.

I thank you again for this meeting. I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me, and I impart my heartfelt apostolic blessing, which I extend to all those who make up your diocesan communities.