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Letter of the Holy Father on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the attacks on the Papal Basilica of Saint John Lateran and the Church of San Giorgio in Velabro

The following is the Letter sent by the Holy Father Francis to the auxiliary bishop and vice-gerent of the diocese of Rome, Bishop Baldassare Reina, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the attacks on the Papal Basilica of Saint John Lateran and the Church of San Giorgio in Velabro:

Letter of the Holy Father

To Bishop Baldassare Reina

Auxiliary Bishop and Vice-Gerent of the Diocese of Rome

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the attacks on the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome and the Church of San Giorgio in Velabro, I wish to join spiritually in this significant moment of prayer organized by the diocese, along with the authorities of Rome and the *Libera* Association.

The cowardly gesture that, on the night between 27 and 28 July 1993 shook the Eternal City, profoundly disturbed the souls of believers throughout the Catholic world and the faithful of Rome in particular. In those dark years of the social history of the dear Italian nation, marked by equally grave acts of violence against institutions and servants of the State, the population experienced a feeling of powerlessness in the face of such senseless abuse perpetrated to the detriment of the country and in particular the least well-off, in contexts plagued by so much human and material poverty.

Today more than ever it is the duty of everyone to remember gratefully those who, in the fulfilment of their duty, sometimes risking their lives, devoted themselves to the protection of the community. The sacrifice of those who believed in and defended the founding values of a democracy, those of justice and liberty, becomes a powerful call to conscience so that all may feel co-responsible in the building of a new civilization of love.

The prophetic words of Saint John Paul II in his historical pastoral visit to Agrigento, a few months before the sad events we are recalling, return with force: “Let there be concord, this concord and this peace to which every people aspires ... Here we need a civilization of life” (Saint John Paul II, at the end of the Eucharistic Celebration in the Valle dei Templi, 9 May 1993). Therefore, I urge that we oppose decisively the many forms of illegality and abuse that unfortunately still beset contemporary society. The common good, and in particular the destiny of the most fragile categories, the least, those who suffer injustices of every type, are at stake.

I address you, young people, the hope of a beautiful future: you must have the courage to venture without fear because mafias – let us remember this – take root when fear takes hold of the mind and the heart.

You who, like beacons in the night, will participate in the torchlight procession commemorating those tragic events, are called to be an active support to the change of mentality, a glimmer of light in the midst of the darkness, a witness of freedom, justice and rectitude. I also hope that those who exercise civil responsibilities as well as the many ecclesial members of our city, will work actively to promote a new humanity.

Do not hesitate to stand beside the people with tenderness and compassion, especially those who live in the peripheries – I think of your peers – welcoming the teaching left to us by the Master: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (cf. *Mt* 25: 31-46).

I pray to the Lord that He accompany you in the darkness of the night, torches in hand, symbol of your faith, making you light for our beloved diocese.

As I entrust each one of you to the maternal protection of the *Salus Populi Romani* and Saints Peter and Paul, I send my blessing, asking you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

Faternally

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 25 July 2023

Feast of Saint James the Great, Apostle

FRANCIS
