



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

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Pastoral Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Verona – Meeting with detainees

At the end of the meeting in the Arena of Verona, the Holy Father Francis transferred by car to Montorio Prison where, upon arrival, he was welcomed by the Director, Dr. Francesca Gioieni, the Prison Police Director, Dr. Mario Piramide, and a young detainee.

In the prison, Pope Francis greeted the Prison Police officers, the detainees present, and the volunteers. Approximately five hundred detainees were present.

After the greeting from the Prison Police Director, the welcome address from the Prison Director, and the words of thanks and gratitude from a young detainee, the Pope delivered his address.

Then, after the exchange of gifts and the blessing, Pope Francis lunched privately with the detainees.

The following is the Holy Father's address to those present during the meeting, and his impromptu words at the moment of the presentation of the gift to the Prison:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I thank the Director for her welcome and all of you for the warmth, joy, and affection you have shown me. A greeting also goes to all those who work in this institution: the custodial officers, educators, healthcare workers, administrative staff, and volunteers. I was very keen to meet you all together.

For me, entering a prison is always an important moment because prison is a place of great humanity. Humanity that is tested, sometimes burdened by difficulties, guilt, judgments, misunderstandings, and suffering, but at the same time full of strength, a desire for forgiveness, and the will to redeem oneself.

And in this humanity, here, in all of you, in all of us, the face of Christ is present today, the face of the God of mercy and forgiveness.

We know the situation of prisons, often overcrowded, with consequent tensions and hardships. For this reason, I want to tell you that I am close to you, and I renew my appeal, especially to those who can act in this area, to continue working for the improvement of prison life.

Following the news of your institution, with sorrow, I learned that unfortunately, here, recently, some people, in an extreme gesture, ended their lives. This is a terrible act, one that only unsustainable despair and pain can lead to. Therefore, while I join in prayer with the families and all of you, I want to invite you not to give in to discouragement. Life is always worth living, and there is always hope for the future, even when everything seems to be draining away. Our existence, the existence of each of us, is important, it is a unique gift for us and for others, for everyone, and especially for God, who never abandons us, and who indeed knows how to listen, rejoice, and weep with us. With Him by our side, we can overcome despair and live each moment as the right time to start again. Therefore, in the worst moments, let's not close in on ourselves: let's talk to God about our pain and help each other to bear it, among companions on the journey and with the good people we find by our side. It is not weakness to ask for help: let's do it with humility and trust. We all need each other, and we all have the right to hope, beyond any history and any mistake or failure.

In a few months, the Holy Year will begin: a year of conversion, renewal, and liberation for the whole Church; a year of mercy, in which to lay down the burden of the past and renew momentum towards the future; in which to celebrate the possibility of change, to be and, where necessary, to return to being truly ourselves, giving our very best. Let this also be a sign that helps us to rise again and to take back, with confidence, our lives every day.

Dear friends, thank you for this meeting. Let us continue to walk together because love unites us beyond any kind of distance. I remember you in my prayers, and I ask you, please, to pray for me too. Thank you.

Impromptu words of the Holy Father

And now I will give a gift to the prison. I will give it to the director. This gift... I thought of a virtue that God has, and which we forget, don't we? Because God has three principal virtues: closeness, compassion and tenderness. God is close to all of us, God is compassionate, and God is tender. And I thought about tenderness – we don't talk much about tenderness – and I thought of this gift: the Madonna with Child, which is indeed a gesture of tenderness. And I also thought that the figure of Mary is a figure common to both Christianity and Islam, she is a common figure, she unites us all.

Now I would like to give you the blessing, but I will give it in silence; in this way each person receives it from God in the way that he or she believes. A minute of silence, and I will give the blessing to you all.

[Blessing]

May the Lord bless you, help you always to keep going forward, comfort you in sadness and be your companion in joy. Amen.

Enjoy your lunch, and goodbye!
