



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ITALIAN REGION OF ABRUZZO
AFFECTED BY THE EARTHQUAKE

**MEETING WITH THE FAITHFUL, VOLUNTEERS, RESCUE TEAMS,
MILITARY MEMBERS AND OTHER AUTHORITIES**

***ADDRESS AND PRAYER
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Square in front of the School of the "Guardia di Finanza", Coppito - L'Aquila
Tuesday, 28 April 2009*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your welcome by which I am deeply touched. I embrace you all with affection in the name of Christ, our firm Hope. I greet your Archbishop, dear Mons. Giuseppe Molinari, who as Pastor has shared and is sharing with you this harsh trial; I address my thanks to him for the moving words full of faith and evangelical trust with which he has interpreted your sentiments. I greet Hon. Mr Massimo Cialente, Mayor of L'Aquila, who is working with great commitment for the rebirth of this city, as well as Hon. Mr Gianni Chiodi, President of the Region. I thank them both for their courteous words. I greet the *Guardia di Finanza*, which is hosting us here. I greet the Parish priests, and the other priests and religious. I greet the Mayors of the villages struck by the disaster, and all the civil and military Authorities: the Civil Defence Corps, the Fire brigade, the Red Cross, the Rescue Teams, and the numerous volunteers of the many different associations. To name them all would be difficult, but I would like to reach out to each one with a special word of appreciation.

Thank you for all you have done and especially for the love with which you have done it. Thank you for the example you have given. Persevere united and well-coordinated, so that effective solutions may be found as soon as possible for those who today live in tent camps. I earnestly hope for this and pray for it.

I began my Visit at Onna, so badly shaken by the earthquake, also thinking of the other communities hit by the quake. I carry in my heart all the victims of this catastrophe: children, young people, adults, the elderly, those from the Abruzzo, as well as those from other regions of Italy or even from different nations. The stop in the Basilica of Collemaggio to venerate the remains of Pope St Celestine v gave me an opportunity to feel tangibly this city's wounded heart. My homage is intended as a homage to the history and faith of your region and to all of you who identify with this Saint. As a sign of my spiritual participation I left on his tomb, as you mentioned, Mr Mayor, the Pallium conferred upon me on the day of the inauguration of my Pontificate. Moreover, it was deeply moving for me to pray in front of the *Casa dello studente*, where many young lives were cut short by the violence of the earthquake. Passing through the city, I have become even more aware of how serious the consequences of the earthquake are.

Here I am now in this square in front of the School of the *Guardia di Finanza* which has functioned since almost the very first moment as the general headquarters of the entire rescue operation. This place consecrated by prayers and mourning for the victims is the symbol of your tenacious determination not to give into despair. "*Nec recisa recedit*": the motto of the Corps of the *Guardia di Finanza*, which we can admire on the façade of the building, seems to express well what the Mayor described as the firm intention to rebuild the city with the constancy which is characteristic of the people of Abruzzo. This large square, which accommodated the bodies of the many victims during the funeral celebration presided by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State, today gathers the forces committed to helping L'Aquila and Abruzzo to rise quickly from the rubble of the earthquake. As the Archbishop recalled, my visit among you, which I desired to make from the very outset, is intended as a sign of my closeness to each one of you and of the whole Church's fraternal solidarity. In fact, as a Christian community, we constitute a single spiritual body and if one part suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; and if one part tries to raise itself, all the parts share in its effort. I must tell you that expressions of solidarity for you have reached me from all over the world. Numerous senior figures of the Orthodox Churches have written to me to assure me of their prayers and spiritual closeness and have also sent financial aid.

I would like to stress the value and importance of solidarity which, although it is shown in particular in moments of crisis, is like fire concealed beneath the ashes. Solidarity is a deeply civil and Christian sentiment and is the benchmark of a society's maturity. In practice, it manifests in rescue work but it is not only an effective organizational machine: there is a soul, there is a passion, which derive precisely from our people's great civil and Christian history, both in institutional forms and in voluntary work. And today I wish to pay homage to this too.

The tragic event of the earthquake invites the civil community and the Church to profound reflection. As Christians we must ask ourselves: "What does the Lord want to say to us through this sorrowful event?". We lived Easter facing this trauma, questioning the word of God and receiving new light from the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord. We celebrated the death and Resurrection of Christ bearing your sorrow in mind and heart, praying that the afflicted people

would never lack trust in God and hope. But also as a civil community it is necessary to make a serious examination of conscience to ensure that the level of responsibility never diminishes. In this condition, L'Aquila [in English "the eagle"], though wounded, will be able to fly again.

I now invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to turn your gaze to the statue of Our Lady of Roio, venerated in a Shrine very dear to you, to entrust to her, Our Lady of the Cross, the city and all the other towns affected by the earthquake. I am leaving her a golden rose as a sign of my prayers for you, while I commend all the places that were struck to her motherly and heavenly protection.

And now, let us pray:

*O Mary, our most beloved Mother!
 You who stand close to our crosses,
 as you remained close to the Cross of Jesus,
 sustain our faith, so that even stricken by grief,
 we may keep our gaze fixed on the Face of Christ in whom was revealed, in the extreme suffering
 of the Cross,
 God's immense and pure love.
 Mother of our hope,
 give us your eyes to see beyond suffering and death the light of the Resurrection;
 give us your heart to continue,
 even in trials, to love and to serve.
 O Mary, Our Lady of Roio,
 Our Lady of the Cross, pray for us!*

Regina Caeli...

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