



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA
[22-25 SEPTEMBER 2018]

VISIT TO THE MATER MISERICORDIAE SHRINE PRAYER OF THE HOLY FATHER

Shrine of the Mother of Mercy, Vilnius (Lithuania)

Saturday, 22 September 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are standing before the Gate of Dawn, the only remnant of the defensive walls of this city, which served to defend it from all danger and threat. In 1799, the invading forces razed that wall, leaving only this gate. Even then, it sheltered the image of the Virgin Mary “Mother of Mercy”, the holy Mother of God who is always ready to help us, to come to our aid.

From that time forward, Mary has sought to teach us that we can defend without attacking, that we can keep safe without the unhealthy need to distrust others. This Mother without Child, radiant with gold, is the Mother of everyone. She sees in every person who comes here what we ourselves fail so often to see: the face of her Son Jesus impressed on our heart.

Because the image of Jesus is impressed on every human heart, every man and every woman make it possible for us to encounter God. When we close our hearts for fear of others, when we build walls and barricades, we end up depriving ourselves of the Good News of Jesus, who shares in the history and the lives of others. In the past, we built all too many fortresses, but today we feel the need to look one another in the face and acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters, to walk side by side, and to discover and experience with joy and peace the value of fraternity (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87).

Here each day crowds of people from numerous countries come to visit the Mother of Mercy:

Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians and Russians; Catholics and Orthodox. Today this is possible, thanks to ready communications and the freedom of circulation between our countries. How good it would be if this ease in moving from one place to another could be accompanied by ease in establishing points of encounter and solidarity, so that we can share generously the gifts we have freely received. So that we can go out and give ourselves to one another, receiving in turn the presence and the diversity of others as a gift and a source of enrichment in our lives.

At times it might seem that openness to the world draws us into the ring of competition, where, “man is a wolf to man”, and there is room only for conflict that divides us, tensions that exhaust us, hatred and enmity that get us nowhere (cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 71-72).

The Mother of Mercy, like every good mother, tries to bring her family together. She whispers in our ear: “Look for your brother, look for your sister”. In this way, she opens to us the door to a new dawn, a new day. She brings us to its very doorstep, like that of the rich man in the Gospel (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31), where today children and families with bleeding wounds await us. Their wounds are not the wounds of Lazarus in the parable; they are the wounds of Jesus, and they are altogether real. In their pain and darkness, they cry out for us to bring to them the healing light of charity. For charity is the key that opens to us the door of heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters, in crossing this doorstep, may we experience the power that purifies our way of dealing with our neighbours. May Mary our Mother grant that we may regard their limits and faults with mercy and humility, thinking ourselves superior to no one (cf. *Phil* 2:3). As we contemplate the mysteries of the Rosary, let us ask Mary that we may be a community capable of proclaiming *Jesus Christ our hope*. And that, in this way, we can build a country capable of accepting everyone, of receiving from the Virgin Mother the gifts of dialogue and patience, of closeness and welcome, a country that loves, pardons and does not condemn (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 165). May we be a country that chooses to build bridges not walls, that prefers mercy not judgment.

May Mary always be the Gate of Dawn for this whole blessed land.

Allowing ourselves to be guided by Mary, let us now pray a decade of the Rosary, contemplating the third joyful mystery.