



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PIETRELCINA AND TO SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO,
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SAINT'S DEATH

MEETING WITH THE FAITHFUL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

*Square in front of the liturgical hall, Pietrelcina
Saturday, 17 March 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brother and Sisters, Good Morning

I am glad to be in this town, where Francesco Forgione was born and began his long and fruitful human and spiritual life. In this community he tempered his humanity; he learned to pray and to recognize in the poor the flesh of the Lord, so that he grew up in the *sequela* of Christ and requested to be admitted to the Friars Minor Capuchin, becoming in this way Brother Pio of Pietrelcina. Here he began to experience the maternity of the Church, to whom he was always a devoted son. He loved the Church, he loved the Church with all her problems, with all her difficulties, with all our sins. Because we are all sinners, we are ashamed, but the Spirit of God has called us within this Church who is holy. And he loved the holy Church and her sinful children, all of them. This was Saint Pio. Here he meditated with intensity on the mystery of God who loved us to the extent of giving himself for us (cf. Gal 2:20). Recollecting with esteem and affection this holy disciple of Saint Francis, I cordially greet all of you, his countrymen; your parish priest; and the Mayor, along with the Pastor of the diocese, Archbishop Felice Accrocca, the Capuchin community and all those of you who have wished to be present.

Today, we are on the very ground where Padre Pio dwelt in September 1911, to “breathe a little healthier air”. At that time there were no antibiotics and diseases were treated by returning to

one's home town, to one's mother, to eat things that are good for you, to breathe good air and to pray. This is what he did, like any other man, like a peasant. This was his nobility. He never denied his home town, he never denied his birth, he never denied his family. Indeed, in that time he lived in his home town for health reasons. That was not an easy time for him: his inner soul was sorely tormented and he feared to fall prey to sin, feeling he was being attacked by the devil. And this gives no respite, because he [the devil] is restless. But do you believe that the devil exists? ... You are not quite convinced? ... I will tell the bishop to do some catechesis ... Does the devil exist or not? [they answer: "Yes!"]. And he goes, he goes everywhere, he gets inside of us, he moves us, he torments us, he deceives us. And he [Padre Pio] was afraid that the devil would attack him, would drive him to sin. He could only speak of this to a few, either by letter or in the town: only to the Archpriest Don Salvatore Pannullo did he manifest "almost all" his "wish to have some enlightenment on this" (*Letter 57*, in *Epistolario* i, p. 250), because he did not understand, he wanted to clarify what was happening in his soul. He was a good youth!

In those terrible moments, Padre Pio drew vital lymph from the continuous prayer and the trust he was able to place in the Lord: "All the ugly ghosts" — he would say — "that the devil is introducing into my mind disappear when I trustfully abandon myself to the arms of Jesus". Here there is all of theology! You have a problem, you are sad, you are sick: abandon yourself to the arms of Jesus. And this is what he did. He loved Jesus and he trusted in him. Thus he wrote to the Minister Provincial, confirming that his heart felt "drawn to a higher force before joining Him in the morning Sacrament". "And this hunger and thirst, instead of being satiated", after receiving it, "increased ever more" (*Letter 31*, in *Epistolario* i, p. 217). Thus Padre Pio immersed himself in prayer to comply ever better with the divine plans. Through the celebration of Holy Mass, which daily constituted the heart of his day and the fullness of his spirituality, he reached a high level of union with the Lord. During this period, he received special mystical gifts from above, which preceded the manifestation of the signs of the Passion of Christ in his flesh.

Dear brothers and sisters of Pietrelcina and of the Archdiocese of Benevento, you include Saint Pio among the most beautiful and luminous figures of your people. This humble Capuchin friar amazed the world with his life devoted to prayer and patient listening to his brothers, on whose suffering he poured out the love of Christ as a balm. Imitating his heroic example and his virtues, may you also become instruments of God's love, of Jesus' love for the weakest. At the same time, by considering his unconditional loyalty to the Church, you will bear witness to communion, because only communion — that is, always being united, in peace among ourselves, the communion among us — edifies and is constructive. A town that quarrels every day does not mature, is not constructive; it scares people. It is a sick and sad town. Instead, a town that seeks peace, where everyone cares for the other — more or less, but they care for each other — one does not wish evil upon anyone, this town, although small, grows, grows, grows, it expands and becomes strong. Please, do not waste time, strength, in quarrelling among yourselves. This does not serve any purpose. It does not make you grow! It does not make you walk onwards. Let us think of a child who cries, cries, cries and does not want to move from his crib, and cries, cries.

And when the mother puts him on the floor so that he can start to crawl, he cries, cries ... and wants to be put back in his cot. I ask you: will that child be able to walk? No, because he is always in the cot! If a village quarrels, quarrels, quarrels, will it be able to mature? No. Because all the time, all its strength is spent on quarrelling. Please: peace among you, communion among you. And if one of you feels like gossiping about another, bite your tongue. It will do you good, good for your soul, because the tongue will swell up but it will do good, also for the town. Give this witness of communion.

I hope that this territory will be able to draw new life from the experience and teaching of Padre Pio in a difficult time such as the present, as the population gradually decreases and ages because many of the young people are forced to go elsewhere in search of work. The internal migration of young people is a problem. Pray to Our Lady that she may give you the grace that the young may find work here, among you, near the family, and that they are not compelled to go away and search elsewhere, leaving the town to decline. The population ages, but this is a treasure, the elderly are a treasure! Please, do not marginalize the elderly. The elderly must not be marginalized, no. The elderly have wisdom. And may the elderly learn to converse with the youth and may the young learn to talk to the elderly. They know the village, the elderly. When I arrived I had the pleasure of greeting a man of 99 years, and a woman of 97, a youngster. Wonderful! They are your wisdom! Talk to them. May they be the protagonists of the growth of this town. May the intercession of your Saint and fellow citizens support the intention of joining forces, so as to offer to the young generations in particular concrete perspectives for a future of hope. May caring attention, full of tenderness, not be lacking — as I said, — for the elderly, who are the wealth of our communities. It would be good if for once, the Nobel Prize were to be awarded to the elderly who retain humanity's memory.

I encourage this area to preserve as a precious gift the Christian and priestly testimony of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina. May it be for each one of you an incentive to live your life to the full, in the style of the Beatitudes, performing works of mercy. May the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate with the title of *Madonna della Libera*, help you to walk with joy on the path of holiness. And please, pray for me, because I need it. Thank you!