



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE HOSTEL OF THE DIOCESAN CARITAS OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Stazione Termini, Via Marsala (Rome)

Sunday, 14 February 2010

(Video)

Dear Friends,

I joyfully accepted the invitation to visit this Hostel named after "Don Luigi Di Liegro", the first Director of the Diocesan *Caritas* of Rome, which was founded over 30 years ago. I warmly thank Cardinal Agostino Vallini, Vicar of Rome, and Mr Mauro Moretti, Director of the State Railways, for their courteous words. With special affection I express my gratitude to all of you who frequent this hostel and who through the voice of Mrs Giovanna Cataldo have addressed a warm greeting to me, accompanied by the precious gift of the Crucifix of Onna, a luminous sign of hope. I greet Mr Giuseppe Merisi, President of the Italian *Caritas*, Auxiliary Bishop Guerino Di Tora and Mons. Enrico Feroci, Director of the Rome *Caritas*. I am pleased to greet the Authorities present, in particular the Minister for Infrastructures and Transport, Hon. Mr Altero Matteoli; Hon. Mr Gianni Alemanno, Mayor of Rome, whom I thank for the effective and constant help that the Municipality of Rome offers to the Hostel's activities. I greet the volunteers and everyone present. Thank you for your welcome!

Twenty-three years have passed since this structure set up with the collaboration of the State Railways, which generously made the premises available, and with the financial support of the Municipality of Rome began to welcome its first guests. Over the years further services have been added to the provision of shelter for those with nowhere to sleep, such as the day surgery and the soup kitchen. The first donors have also been joined by others, such as ENEL [the Italian electricity and water board] the *Fondazione Roma*, Mr Agostini Maggini, the Telecom Foundation and the *Ministero dei Beni-Culturali-Arcis spa*, witnessing to the aggregative power of love. Thus

the Hostel has become a place where, thanks to the generous service of many workers and volunteers, Jesus' words are lived out: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25: 35-36).

Dear brothers and sisters and friends who are welcomed here, may you know that the Church loves you deeply and does not abandon you, for she recognizes in each one of your faces the Face of Jesus. He chose to identify very particularly with those in conditions of poverty and wretchedness. The witness of charity, practised here in a special way, is part of the Church's mission, together with the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. Human beings do not only need to be physically nourished or helped through moments of difficulty; they also need to know who they are and to understand the truth about themselves and their dignity. As I recalled in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, "Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way" (n. 3).

With her service for the poor the Church is committed to proclaiming to all the truth about man who is loved by God, created in his image, redeemed by Christ and called to eternal communion with him. A great many people have thus been able to rediscover and are still rediscovering their dignity, lost at times because of tragic events; they rediscover trust in themselves and hope in the future.

Through the actions, looks and words of all who work here, many men and women feel tangibly that their lives are safeguarded by Love, who is God, and thanks to him have a meaning and importance (cf. Encyclical Letter, *Spe Salvi*, n. 35). This profound certainty generates strong, solid and luminous hope in the human heart, hope that gives courage to continue on the journey through life despite the failures, difficulties and trials that go with it. Dear brothers and sisters who work in this place, always keep before your eyes and in your heart the example of Jesus, who out of love made himself our servant and loved us "to the end" (cf. Jn 13: 1), even to the Cross. Therefore be joyful witnesses of the infinite charity of God and, imitating the example of St Lawrence the Deacon, consider these friends of yours one of the most precious treasures of your life.

My Visit occurs during the *European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*, established by the European Parliament and the European Commission. In coming here as Bishop of Rome, the Church which has presided in charity from the from the earliest Christian times (cf. St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, n. 1,1), I desire to encourage not only Catholics but also every person of good will, particularly those who have responsibility in the public administration and in the various institutions, to work for the construction of a future worthy of the human being, rediscovering charity as the driving force for authentic development and for the realization of a more just and brotherly society (cf. Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 1). Charity, in fact, "is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)" (*ibid.*, n. 2). In order

to promote a peaceful coexistence that helps people recognize that they are members of the one human family, it is important that the dimensions of giving and of free generosity are rediscovered as constitutive elements of daily life and of interpersonal relations. All this becomes day after day increasingly urgent in a world in which, on the contrary, the logic of profit and of the quest for the individual's own interest seem to prevail.

For the Church in Rome the *Caritas* Hostel is a precious opportunity to teach the Gospel values. The voluntary service experienced here by many is especially for young people an authentic school in which one learns to be a builder of the civilization of love, able to accept others in each their uniqueness and differences. In this way the Hostel demonstrates in practice that the Christian community through its own bodies and never failing the Truth it proclaims collaborates usefully with the civil institutions for the promotion of the common good. I am confident that the fruitful synergy achieved here may also extend to other situations in our City, particularly in the areas where the consequences of the financial crisis are more keenly felt and the risks of social exclusion are greater. In her service to people in difficulty, the Church is motivated solely by the desire to express her faith in that God who is the defender of the poor and who loves every person for what he or she is, not for what he or she possesses or achieves. The Church lives through history with the knowledge that the troubles and needs of human beings, especially those of the poor and all the suffering, are also those of Christ's disciples (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). For this reason, with respect for the competences proper to the State, she will do her utmost to ensure that every human being is guaranteed what he or she is due.

Dear brothers and sisters, for Rome the Diocesan *Caritas* Hostel is a place where love is not merely a word or sentiment but rather is a concrete reality that allows God's light to enter the lives of men and women and of the entire civil community. This light helps us look with trust to the future, certain that in the future too our city will stay faithful to the value of hospitality that is so firmly rooted in her history and in the hearts of her citizens. May the Virgin Mary, *Salus populi romani*, always accompany you with her motherly intercession and help each one of you make this place a house where the same virtues flourish that were present in the Holy House of Nazareth. With these sentiments, I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all your loved ones and all who live in this place and give themselves generously.

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