



The Holy See

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF GYPSIES FROM ALL OVER EUROPE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 11 June 2011*

*Venerable Brothers,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

o Del si tumentsa! [The Lord be with you!]

It gives me great joy to meet you and to offer you a warm welcome on the occasion of your pilgrimage to the Apostle Peter's tomb. I thank Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, for his words also on your behalf and for organizing the event. I also extend the expression of my gratitude to the *Migrantes* Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference, to the Diocese of Rome and to the Sant'Egidio Community for their collaboration in bringing this pilgrimage about and for all they do every day for your acceptance and integration. I extend a special "thank you" to those of you who have offered your truly significant testimonies.

You have come to Rome from every part of Europe to express your faith and your love for Christ and for the Church — which is a home to you all — and for the Pope. The Servant of God Paul VI addressed these unforgettable words to Gypsies in 1965: "In the Church you are not on the fringes of society but in some respects in its centre, in its heart. You are in the heart of the Church". Today too I repeat with affection: you are in the Church! You are a beloved portion of the pilgrim People of God and remind us that here "we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). The message of salvation has also reached you and you have responded to it with faith and hope enriching the ecclesial community with gypsy lay believers, priests, deacons and religious. Your people has given the Church Bl. Ceferino Giménez Malla, the 150th anniversary of

whose birth and the 75th anniversary of whose martyrdom we are celebrating. Friendship with the Lord made this martyr a genuine witness of faith and charity. Bl. Ceferino loved the Church and her pastors with the same intensity as that with which he adored God whose presence he discovered in every person and in every event. As a Third Order Franciscan, he stayed faithful to his gypsy existence, to the history and identity of his race. Having married in accordance with the gypsy tradition, he and his wife decided together to validate the bond in the Church with the sacrament of Marriage. His deep religious sense was expressed in his daily participation in Holy Mass and in the recitation of the Rosary. The rosary beads themselves, which he always kept in his pocket became the cause of his arrest and made Bl. Ceferino an authentic “martyr of the Rosary”, because he did not let anyone take the rosary from him, not even when he was at the point of death. Today, Bl. Ceferino invites us to follow his example and shows us the way: dedication to prayer and in particular to the Rosary, love for the Eucharist and for the other sacraments, the observance of the commandments, honesty, charity and generosity to our neighbour, especially the poor; all this will strengthen you in the face of the risk that sects may endanger your communion with the Church.

Your history is complex and in some periods, painful. You are a people who in past centuries did not uphold nationalistic ideologies nor aspired to possess land or dominate other peoples. Being without a homeland, in spirit, you considered the entire continent your home. Nevertheless, serious and disturbing problems persist, such as the frequently difficult relations you have with the societies in which you live. Unfortunately through the centuries you have tasted the bitterness of inhospitality and at times, persecution, as occurred during the Second World War: thousands of women, men and children were barbarously killed in extermination camps. It was — as you say — the *Porráimos*, the “Great Devouring”, a tragedy still little known and whose proportions are difficult to gauge, but which your families bear impressed in their hearts. During my visit to the concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 28 May 2006, I prayed for the victims of persecution and bowed before the stone slab which commemorates your fallen, in the *Romanes* tongue. The European conscience cannot forget so much suffering! May your people never again be the object of harassment, rejection and contempt! On your part, always seek justice, legality and reconciliation and do your utmost never to be the cause of others’ suffering!

Today, thanks be to God, the situation is changing: new opportunities are unfolding before you while you are acquiring new awareness. As time has passed you have created a culture with important expressions, such as the music and song which have enriched Europe. Many races are no longer nomadic, but seek stability with new expectations in life. The Church walks with you and invites you to live in accordance with the demanding requirements of the Gospel, trusting in the power of Christ, towards a better future. Europe too, which is opening its frontiers and considers the diversity of peoples and cultures a treasure, is offering you new possibilities. I ask you, dear friends, to write together a new page of history for your people and for Europe! The search for housing and dignified work and education for your children are the foundations on which to build that integration from which you and society as a whole will benefit. May you too offer your effective

and loyal collaboration so that your families may fit with dignity into the civil fabric of Europe! Many of your children and young people wish to be educated and to live with and like others. I see them with special affection, convinced that your children are entitled to a better life. May their good be your greatest aspiration! Preserve the dignity and value of your families, little domestic churches, so that they may be true schools of humanity (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52). The institutions, for their part, should do all they can to offer this process appropriate guidance.

Lastly, you too are called to participate actively in the Church's evangelizing mission, promoting pastoral activity in your communities. The presence among you of priests, deacons and consecrated people, who belong to your races, is a gift from God and a positive sign of the dialogue between the local Churches and your people, which needs to be sustained and developed. Trust these brothers and sisters of yours and listen to them, and with them offer the consistent and joyful proclamation of God's love for the gypsy people, as for all the peoples! The Church wants all men and women to see themselves as children of the same Father and members of the same human family. We are on the eve of Pentecost, when the Lord poured out his Spirit upon the Apostles who began to proclaim the Gospel in the languages of all the peoples. May the Holy Spirit shower an abundance of his gifts upon you all, upon your families and upon your communities scattered across the world, and make you generous witnesses of the Risen Christ. May Mary Most Holy, so dear to your people and whom you invoke as "*Amari Devleskeridej*", "Our Mother of God", accompany you on the highways of the world and may Bl. Ceferino support you with his intercession.

I warmly thank you all for coming here to the See of Peter to express your faith and love for the Church and for the Pope. May Bl. Ceferino always be for you an example of a life lived for Christ and for the Church, in observing the commandments and in love for your neighbour. The Pope is close to each one of you and remembers you in his prayers. May the Lord bless you, your communities, your families and your future. May the Lord give you good health and good fortune! Stay with God!

Thank you! And a good Pentecost to you all!