



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE AREA AFFECTED BY THE EARTHQUAKE IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA, ITALY (26 JUNE 2012)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*San Marino di Carpi - Modena, Italy
Tuesday, 26 June 2012*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your welcome!

Since the first days of the earthquake that hit you I have always been close to you with my prayers and concern. But when I saw that the trial had become harsher, I felt ever more strongly the need to come to you in person. And I thank the Lord who has granted me to do so!

With great affection I am with you who are gathered here, and embrace with my mind and with my heart all the villages, all the peoples who have been damaged by the earthquake, especially the families and communities who are mourning the dead: may the Lord welcome them in his peace! I would have liked to visit all the communities to make myself personally and physically present, but you know well how difficult that would have been. At this time, however, I want everyone, in every town, to feel how close the Pope's heart is to your own hearts, so as to comfort you and above all to encourage and support you.

I greet you, Mr Minister, Representative of the Government, the Head of the Department of Civil Defence and Hon. Mr Vasco Errani, President of the Emilia-Romagna Region, whom I wholeheartedly thank for his words on behalf of the institutions and of the civil community. I would then like to thank Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, Archbishop of Bologna, for his affectionate expressions addressed to me; they demonstrate the stoutness of your hearts which are not split but are profoundly united in faith and hope. I greet and thank my Brother Bishops and Priests, the

representatives of the different religious and social institutions, the police force and volunteers: it is important to witness tangibly to solidarity and unity. In particular I thank the volunteers for this great witness.

As I was saying to you, I felt the need to come to you, if only for a brief moment. Even when I was in Milan for the [World Meeting of Families](#) at the beginning of this month, I would have liked to come and visit you and you were often in my thoughts. Indeed I knew that in addition to suffering the material consequences, your spirit was also put to the test by recurring and powerful aftershocks; and likewise because of the loss of several symbolic buildings of your towns including, in particular, a great many churches. Here in Rovereto di Novi Fr Ivan Martini lost his life when the church — which I have just seen — collapsed. In paying homage to his memory, I address a special greeting to you, dear priests, and to all your confreres who show your generous love for the People of God, as you did in other difficult periods in the history of these regions.

We priests, as you know — and also men and women religious and many lay people — pray every day using the “Breviary”, which contains the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayer of the Church that punctuates the day. We pray with the Psalms, according to an order which is the same for the whole of the Catholic Church throughout the world. Why am I telling you this? Because in these days, in praying Psalm 46, I came across these words that touched me: “God is our refuge and strength, / an ever-present help in distress. / Therefore we fear not, though the earth be shaken / and mountains plunge into the sea” (Ps 46[45]:2-3).

How often have I read these words? Countless times! I have been a priest for 61 years! Yet in moments like these they make a strong impression for they touch the living, they give a voice to an experience you are now living through and in which everyone who is praying shares. Yet — you see — it is not because these words of the Psalm draw upon the image of the earthquake that they strike me but above all because of what they say about our interior attitude in the face of an upheaval of nature: an attitude of great assurance, based on the sound, unshakeable rock that is God. We “fear not, though the earth be shaken”, the psalmist says, “God is our refuge and our strength”, he is “an ever-present help in distress”.

Dear brothers and sisters, these words seem to clash with the fear that is inevitably felt after an experience such as the one you have been through — an immediate reaction, which can be even more deeply impressed if the phenomenon endures. Yet the Psalm does not in fact refer to this type of fear, that is natural, and the reassurance it affirms is not that of superhumans who are not touched by normal sentiments. The assurance of which it speaks is that of faith, which is why, yes, fear and anguish can exist — Jesus felt them too, as we know — but, in all fear and anguish, above all there is the certainty that God is with us; like the child who knows he can always count on his mother and father, because whatever happens he feels loved, he feels wanted. This is how we are in relation to God: small, frail, but safe in his hands, in other words entrusted to his Love which is as solid as rock. We see this Love in the crucified Christ, who is at the same time the sign

of pain, of suffering and of love. It is the revelation of God Love, in solidarity with us even to the most extreme humiliation.

On this rock, with this firm hope, it is possible to build and rebuild. Italy was rebuilt on the rubble — and not only material rubble — of the postwar period, certainly also thanks to the aid it received, but above all thanks to the faith of so many people motivated by a spirit of true solidarity, by the wish to give families a future, a future of freedom and peace. You are people esteemed by all Italians for your humanity and sociability, for your hard work combined with cheerfulness. All this has been sorely tried by this situation but must not and cannot corrode what you are as people, your history and your culture. Stay faithful to your vocation as brotherly, supportive people and you will face everything with patience and determination, rejecting the temptations that are unfortunately connected with these moments of weakness and need.

The situation you are living in has shed light on one aspect that I would like to be very present in your hearts: you are not and you will not be alone! In these days, amidst all this destruction and much sorrow, you have seen and heard that so many people have taken steps to express closeness, solidarity and affection to you; and they have done so through numerous signs and of aid. My presence among you is intended as one of these signs of love and hope. Looking at your lands I felt deeply moved before so many injuries, but I have also seen a great many hands that want to heal them together with you; I have seen that life begins again, it wants to start again with strength and courage and this is the most beautiful and luminous sign.

I would like to launch a strong appeal from this place to the institutions, to every citizen, to be, even in the difficulties of the moment, like the Good Samaritan of the Gospel who does not pass by indifferent to those who are in need but bends over them lovingly, brings help, stays beside them, taking upon themselves all the needs of the other person (cf. Lk 10:29-37). The Church is close and will be close to you with her prayers and the practical help of her organizations and especially *Caritas*, which will also be dedicated to repairing the community fabric of the parishes.

Dear friends, I bless you, each and every one, and carry you in my heart with great affection.