



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE DIOCESES OF
CAMPOBASSO-BOIANO
AND
ISERNIA-VENAFRO

MEETING WITH THE DETAINEES

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Local penitentiary (Isernia)
Saturday, 5 July 2014

Video

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good afternoon,

I thank you for your welcome. And I thank you for your witness of hope, which I heard in the words of your representative. Even in the Governor's greeting this word struck me: hope. This is the challenge, as I was saying two weeks ago at the prison of Castrovillari: the challenge is social reintegration. And for this, you need an itinerary, a route, whether outside, in the prison, in society, whether inside oneself, in the conscience and in the heart.

To make the journey of reintegration, which all of us must do. Everyone. All of us make mistakes in life. And all of us must ask forgiveness for these mistakes and undertake the journey of reintegration, in order not to make any more. Some make this journey at home, in their own work; others, like you, in a penitentiary. But everyone, everyone.... Whoever says he does not need to make a journey of reintegration is a liar! All of us make mistakes in life and all of us, too, are sinners. And when we go to ask the Lord for forgiveness for our sins, for our mistakes, He always forgives us, He never tires of forgiving. He tells us: "Turn your back on this path, this is not the right one for you". And He helps us. And this is reintegration, the journey that we all have to make.

What is important is not to stand still. We all know that when water stands still it stagnates. There's a saying in Spanish that says: "Standing water is the first to go bad". Do not stand still. We all have to walk, to take a step every day, with the Lord's help. God is Father, he is mercy, he always loves us. If we seek Him, He welcomes us and forgives us. As I said, He never tires of forgiving. This is the motto of this visit: "God doesn't tire of forgiving". He makes us rise and fully restores our dignity. God has a memory, He is not forgetful. God does not forget us, He always remembers. There is a passage in the Bible, from the prophet Isaiah, which says: Even should a mother forget her child — which is impossible — I will never forget you (cf. Is 49:15). And this is true: God thinks about me, God remembers me. I am in God's memory.

And with this trust, we can walk, day by day. And with this steadfast love which accompanies us, hope will not let us down. With this love hope will never let us down: a steadfast love to go forward with the Lord. Some consider taking a path of punishment, of misdeeds, of sins and just to suffer, suffer, suffer.... It is true, it is true we suffer. As your fellow inmate said, here you suffer. There is suffering inside and also outside, when one sees that one's own conscience is tainted, sullied, one wants to change it. That suffering which purifies, that fire which purifies gold, is a hope-filled suffering. There is a beautiful thing, when the Lord forgives us he doesn't say: "I forgive you, get on with it!". No, He forgives us, he takes us by the hand and he helps us to go forward on this journey of reintegration, in our own personal life and also in social life. He does this with all of us. To think that punishment alone corrects the inner order of a person only through "beating" — I don't know if it's said like this — that it is corrected only by punishment, this is not God, this is mistaken. Some people think: "No, no, more severe punishment is needed, more years, more!". This solves nothing, nothing! To cage people because — pardon the word — for the mere fact that if he is inside we are safe, this serves nothing, it does not help us. The most important thing is what God does for us: he takes us by the hand and helps us to go forward. And this is called hope! And with this hope, with this trust it is possible to walk day by day. And with this steadfast love, which accompanies us, hope never lets us down, truly.

I thank you for the welcome. And I would like to say... this comes to mind now, because I always feel it, even when, every 15 days I phone a prison in Buenos Aires, where there are young people and we talk a little on the 'phone. I'll tell you something personal. When I meet with one of you, who is in jail, who is moving toward reintegration, but who is imprisoned, I sincerely wonder: why him and not me? I feel this way. It's a mystery. But beginning with this feeling, with this feeling I accompany you.

Let us pray together to Our Lady, our Mother, that she help us and accompany us. She is Mother.
Hail Mary....

And please pray for me! Pray for me!

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