



The Holy See

VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO VENICE

MEETING WITH THE INMATES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Internal courtyard of the Venice Women's Prison on the Island of Giudecca
Fifth Sunday of Easter, 28 April 2024

[Multimedia]

Dear sisters, dear brothers! We are all brothers and sisters, all of us, and no-one can disown the other, no-one!

I greet you all affectionately, especially you sisters, detainees in the Giudecca Women's Prison. I very much wanted to meet you at the beginning of my visit to Venice to tell you that you have a special place in my heart.

I would like, therefore, for us to experience this moment not so much as an "official visit", but rather as an encounter in which, thanks be to God, we can give each other time, prayer, closeness and fraternal affection. Today we will all leave this courtyard richer — perhaps I am the one who will leave the richer — and the good we will exchange will be precious.

It is the Lord who wants us to be together at this moment, having arrived by different paths, some very painful, also because of mistakes for which, in various ways, each person bears wounds and scars, every person bears scars. And God wants us together because He knows that each of us, here, today, has something unique to give and to receive, and that we are all in need of it. Each one of us has his or her own uniqueness, he or she has a gift and this is to be offered, to be shared.

Prison is a harsh reality, and problems such as overcrowding, the lack of facilities and resources, and episodes of violence, give rise to a great deal of suffering there. But it can also become a place of rebirth, of moral and material rebirth, where the dignity of women and men is not “placed in confinement” but promoted through mutual respect and the nurturing of talents and abilities, perhaps dormant or imprisoned by the vicissitudes of life, but which can re-emerge for the good of all and which deserve attention and trust. No-one can take away a person’s dignity, no-one!

So, paradoxically, a stay in prison can mark the beginning of something new, through the rediscovery of the unsuspected beauty in us and in others, as symbolized by the artistic event you are hosting and the project to which you actively contribute; it can become a building site for reconstruction, in which to courageously look at and evaluate one’s own life, remove what is not needed, what is cluttering, harmful or dangerous, draw up a plan, and then start again by digging foundations and going back, in the light of experience, to putting brick upon brick, together, with determination. This is why it is fundamental that the prison system also offer detainees the tools and room for human growth, for spiritual, cultural and professional growth, creating the conditions for their healthy reintegration. Please, do not “isolate dignity”, do not isolate dignity, but give new possibilities!

Let us not forget that we all have mistakes to be forgiven and wounds to heal, me too, and that we can all become the healed who bring healing, the forgiven who bring forgiveness, the reborn who bring rebirth.

Dear friends, let us renew today, you and I, together, our trust in the future: do not close the window, please; always look at the horizon, always look to the future, with hope. I like to think that hope is like an anchor, you know, it is anchored in the future, and we have the rope in our hands and go forward with the rope anchored in the future. Let us propose to begin each day by saying, “now is the right time”, today, “today is the right day”, today, (cf. *2 Cor 6:2*), “today I will start again”, always, for the rest of my life!

Thank you for this meeting, and I assure every one of you of my prayer. And you, pray for me, but please, not against me!

And this is the gift I will leave you. Look, it has something of the tenderness of the mother, and Mary has this tenderness with all of us, with all of us, she is the mother of tenderness. Thank you.

[Exchange of gifts and greetings with the detainees]

And now they are sending me away! Thank you, thank you very much, I will remember you! And keep going forward, bravely, don’t give up — onward with courage!
