



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE TOWN OF ASSISI

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II**

*Saturday, 3 January 1998*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. After visiting the little towns of Annifo and Cesi, from where I wished to embrace in spirit all the other places struck by the tragedy of the earthquake, now I am here in Assisi, this city of yours clearly marked by such a harsh trial. I am with you to give you concrete proof of my closeness and that of the whole ecclesial community to each of you. In Bologna, where I went for the Eucharistic Congress the day after the first tremours, I had already expressed my solidarity with all those who had been struck by the quake. Since then I have not ceased to follow them each day, sharing their anxiety, and I am grateful to the Lord that today he has granted me the opportunity to be among you to show you my affection.

I extend a cordial greeting first of all to the Pastor of this beloved Diocese, dear Bishop Sergio Goretti, whom I thank for his warm words, and to all the Bishops of the areas affected by the earthquake, especially to the Archbishop of Spoleto and the Bishop of Fabriano, whose Dioceses I have been unable to visit but whom I have wanted to be here with a representation of some of their people's parish priests. I also greet the community of the Friars Minor Conventual who care so lovingly for this Patriarchal Basilica. My respectful thoughts also turn to the Prime Minister, to the Secretary of the Council of Ministers and to the Undersecretary for the Co-ordination of Civil Defence, to the Presidents of the regions of Umbria and the Marches, to the Mayor of Assisi and the many mayors of the municipalities affected by the earthquake and to all the civil, military and religious authorities present.

I know well how badly the earthquake has affected the precious human and artistic heritage that marks your land, dear brothers and sisters. I also know, however, that you are determined not to give in to discouragement even in the face of so many great difficulties. The Pope is here today to tell you that he is with you and wants to encourage you in your firm resolve to undertake the hard task of rebuilding.

2. From the top of this hill full of Franciscan landmarks, one's gaze sweeps the valley, rises over the slopes of the mountains and can embrace in a single glance *all the localities* struck by the earthquake - the small mountain communities and the large centres, such as Nocera Umbra and Gualdo Tadino. Their problems are substantially the same, and similar damage has been done to their homes and monuments, rich in art and culture. To the suffering of those who have lost their loved ones is added the pain of those who have seen the sacrifices of a lifetime disintegrate in an instant and are now tempted to yield to despair.

However it is our duty to recognize that during the days of repeated seismic tremours, the evidence of dignity and love for their own land offered by the people of Umbria and the Marches aroused great admiration in everyone. Dear brothers and sisters, *may you never stop striving for your ideals!* May your strength of soul, your gifts of diligence and your traditional enterprise never weaken! Indeed, my hope is that they will ultimately be strengthened by this trial, to be expressed in effective and concrete collaboration that will guarantee a rapid recovery.

In this context, I would like to express my keen appreciation of the generous contribution made by the *volunteer workers* and by all those who are helping at various levels in the work of relief and reconstruction. I encourage each one to intensify his efforts to continue in the work undertaken. Faith tells us that what is done for those who are needy and suffering is done to Christ (cf. *Mt* 25:40).

Now that the emergency phase has passed, that of rebuilding is about to start. May the year that has just begun be the *year of rebirth* and of social and economic recovery for these areas! I note with satisfaction the initiatives undertaken by the local and regional administrative authorities, as well as the considerable funds allocated by the Italian Government to meet your most urgent needs. I hope that everything will be completed as soon as possible, so that the panorama of cities and countryside, today largely scarred by piles of rubble and ruined roads, will be restored to their former picturesque beauty by the necessary work of repairing and rebuilding the damaged homes, churches and monuments. And here the words: "Francis, go and repair my house" are more timely than ever.

3. I have come here to Assisi *to pray at the tomb of the "Poverello"*. From this place sacred to the Franciscan tradition and badly damaged by the earthquake, from this basilica admired by men and women throughout the world, I pray fervently to the Lord for the earthquake victims, for their relatives and for all who are still living in precarious conditions. I also pray for the workers and volunteers who labour with the utmost dedication in the worthy task of providing assistance and aid to the homeless. May the Lord comfort them all and make everyone aware of his support!

St Francis, the seraphic son of this land, witnessed with his life to the value of solidarity and service offered lovingly to the needy. Clare, a humble, delicate plant born in this town, spent her whole life here, accompanying with her prayer the apostolic work of the peacemakers and

preachers of the Gospel. How can we fail to feel their presence among us during the difficulties and trials of these months? From heaven they certainly bless and sustain the active, competitive generosity which sees people involved from every corner of Italy at the side of those struck by the earthquake. At the same time, they invite you all, dear brothers and sisters, to face with evangelical spirit the precarious situation in which you are living. In the lives of Francis and Clare there were many moments of suffering and loneliness. One need only remember the many illnesses, hardships and anxieties which culminated in the mystical embrace of the Crucified One which occurred at La Verna, and in the constant adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

May the Franciscan message about the value that hardship and pain acquire in the light of the Gospel help you to recognize and accept in the painful events of recent months the designs of a Father who is always loving even when he allows trials to occur.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, we are in the spirit of the Christmas holidays, and a few days ago we began a new year. I would like to express to each of you my cordial wishes for 1998: may it be a year of hope and solidarity. *Quod Deus avertat a nobis*: not an earthquake year. I am sure that it will not be long before Assisi and the other cities and towns struck by the earthquake recover their picturesque charm and are as resplendent as ever with the restored beauty of their monuments. Thus they will be better able to fulfil their natural vocation of being a symbol of peace and brotherhood for the Church, for Italy and for the whole world.

May Francis and Clare of Assisi obtain from the Lord strength for those tried; may they obtain light for their minds and warmth for their hearts, so that they can quickly achieve all they hope for. With this wish, I cordially impart a special, affectionate Blessing to you gathered here, to the suffering, to the volunteer workers and to everyone involved in various ways in the work of rebuilding, as well as to all the inhabitants of Umbria and the Marches.

*The Holy Father then spoke extemporaneously:*

Happy New Year! I thought that my first visit this year would be to Cuba; instead it is to Assisi! Rain was also forecast for today, but thanks be to God for the sun, the sun of St Francis.