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Pilgrimage of the Holy Father Francis to the tombs of Don Primo Mazzolari and Don Lorenzo Milani (II)

This morning, at 11.10, the helicopter carrying the Holy Father Francis, on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Don Lorenzo Milani, landed in the area below the church of Barbiana (FI).

Upon arrival the Pope was received by the archbishop of Florence, Cardinal Giuseppe Betori, and by the mayor of Vicchio, Roberto Izzo. He then transferred directly to the cemetery for a private visit and to pray before the tomb of Don Milani. The Holy Father then travelled by car to the Church, and upon arrival he greeted various disciples and former pupils of the Florentine priest in the square in front of the Church and inside.

After a moment of personal prayer in the Church, Pope Francis visited the rectory and the school. Then, on the adjacent lawn, introduced by greetings from Cardinal Betori, the Holy Father gave the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, I have come to Barbiana to pay homage to the memory of a priest who bore witness to how, in the gift of self to Christ, one encounters brothers in their needs and serves them, so that their dignity as people is defended and promoted, with the same self-giving that Jesus showed to us unto the Cross.

1. I rejoice at meeting here those who were pupils of Don Lorenzo Milani, some in the San Donato school in Calenzano, others in the school here in Barbiana. You are witnesses of how a priest has lived his mission, in the places in which the Church called him, with full fidelity to the Gospel and, precisely for this reason, with full fidelity to each one of you, whom the Lord entrusted to him. And you are witnesses of his passion as an educator, of his intention to reawaken the human in people, to open them to the divine.

Hence his complete dedication to the school, with a decision that here in Barbiana he implemented in an even more radical way. The school, for Don Lorenzo, was not something different from his mission as a priest, but rather the concrete way in which he carried out that mission, giving it a solid foundation capable of lifting it up to heaven. And when the bishop's decision led him from Calenzano to here, among the children of Barbiana, he understood immediately that if the Lord had permitted that detachment, it was to give him new children to help

raise and love. Giving the word back to the poor, because without the word there is no dignity, nor is there freedom or justice: this is what Don Milani taught. And it is the world that can open the way to full citizenship in society, through work, and to full belonging to the Church, with a conscious faith. This is valid in its way also for our times, in which merely possessing the word can permit it to discern among the many and often confused messages that rain down on us, and to give an expression to the deep yearnings of the heart, as well as the expectations of justice on the part of many brothers and sisters who await justice. The possession of the word as an instrument of freedom and fraternity forms part of that humanization that we claim for every person on this earth, alongside bread, home, work, and family.

2. There are also some children and young people here, who represent for you the many children and young people who today are in need of someone to accompany them on the journey of their growth. I know that you, like many others in the world, live in situations of marginalization, and that someone is next to you so as not to leave you alone, and to indicate to you a path of possible redemption a future that opens up onto more positive prospects. I would therefore like to thank all the educators, those who place themselves at the service of the growth of the new generations, in particular for those who find themselves in situations of hardship. Yours is a mission of love, because one cannot teach without love or without the awareness that what is given is simply a right that is recognized, that of learning. And there are many things to teach, but the essential one is a free conscience, able to face reality and orient itself in this, guided by love and by the desire to compromise with others, to take on their hardships and sufferings, to take refuge from every selfishness to serve the common good. We find written in the Letter to a teacher, "I learned that the problem of others is equal to mine. Finding a way out together is politics. Finding a way out alone is avarice". This is an appeal to responsibility. An appeal that relates to you, dear young people, but first of all to us, adults, called to live the freedom of conscience in an authentic way, as the search for the true, the beautiful and the good, ready to pay the price that this involves. And this, without compromise.

3. Last but not least, I address you priests whom I have wanted next to me here in Barbiana. I see among you elderly priests, who shared with Don Lorenzo Milani years in the seminary or ministry in places near here; and also young priests, who represent the future of the Florentine and Italian clergy. Some of you are therefore witnesses to the human and priestly adventure of Don Lorenzo, others are heirs. I would like to remind all of you that the priestly dimension of Don Lorenzo Milani is the root of all that he did. Everything was born of his being a priest. But, in turn, his being a priest had an even deeper root: his faith. A totalizing faith, that becomes a complete giving of the self to the Lord and that in his priestly ministry found the full and fulfilled form for the converted youth. The words of his spiritual guide, Don Raffaele Bensi, are known, and were drawn upon in those years by the highest figures of Florentine Catholicism, which was so lively around the middle of the last century under the paternal ministry of the venerable Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa. As Don Bensi said: "To save his soul, he came to me. From that August day until the autumn, he literally crammed himself with the Gospel and Christ. That boy set off immediately for the absolute, without half measures. He wanted to save and be saved, at any cost. Transparent and hard as a diamond, he immediately had to wound himself and to wound" (Nazzeno Fabbretti, "Interview with Msgr. Raffaele Bensi", *Domenica del Corriere*, 27 June 1971). Being a priest as a way of living the Absolute. His mother Alice said, "My son was in search of the Absolute. He found it in religion and in the priestly vocation". Without this thirst for the absolute, it is possible to be good functionaries of the sacred, but not priests, true priests, capable of being servants of Christ and of our brothers. Dear priests, with the grace of God, let us seek to be men of faith, a sincere faith, not watered down; and men of charity, pastoral charity towards all those whom the Lord entrusts to us as brothers and sons. Don Lorenzo teaches us also to love the Church, as he loved her, with the sincerity and truth that can also create tensions, but never fractures or abandonment. Let us love the Church, dear confreres, and let her be loved, showing her as a caring mother to all, especially the poorest and most fragile, both in social life and in personal and religious life. The Church that Don Milani showed to the world has this maternal and caring face, extending to everyone the opportunity to encounter God and therefore to give consistency to the self in all its dignity.

4. Before concluding, I cannot omit to mention that the gesture I have made today is intended as a response that that request made several times by Don Lorenzo to his bishop, that is, that he be acknowledged and understood in his faithfulness to the Gospel and in the rectitude of his pastoral action. In a letter to the bishop he wrote: "If you do not honour me today with a solemn act, all my apostolate will appear as a private matter". From the dearly remembered Cardinal Silvano Piovanelli onwards, the archbishops of Florence have on several occasions

given this acknowledgement to Don Milani. Today the bishop of Rome does so. This does not cancel out the bitterness that accompanied the life of Don Milani – it is not a question of cancelling out history or denying it, but rather of understanding the circumstances and humanity in play – but means rather that the Church recognizes in that life an exemplary way of serving the Gospel, the poor and the Church herself. With my presence in Barbiana, with my prayer at the tomb of Don Lorenzo Milani, I think that I am able to answer the hope of his mother: “I am especially concerned that we know the priest, that the truth is known, that the Church is honoured also for what he was in the Church and that the Church honours him ... the Church that made him suffer so much but which gave him the priesthood, and the strength of that faith that remains, for me, the deepest mystery of my son ... If you do not really understand the priest Don Lorenzo was, you will hardly be able to understand the rest about him. For example, his profound equilibrium between hardness and charity” (Nazareno Fabbretti, “Meeting with the mother of the priest of Barbiana, three years after his death”, *Il Resto Del Carlino*, Bologna, 8 July 1970). May this priest, “transparent and tough as a diamond”, continue to shine the light of God on the path of the Church. Take the torch and carry it forward! Thank you.

[Hail Mary]

[Blessing]

Thank you so much again! Pray for me, do not forget. May I too follow the example of this good priest. Thank you for your presence. May the Lord bless you. And you priests, all of you – because there is no retirement in the priesthood! – all of you, forward, and with courage. Thank you.

At the end, the Pope arrived at the space below the Church and at 12.30 he left Barbiana, to return to Rome.

He arrived at the Vatican heliport at 13.16.
