



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING HELD IN THE VATICAN
ON THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 10 January 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* and the Pontifical Commission for Latin America for organizing this meeting, five years after the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. I thank the bishops of Haiti, and each of you, along with the institutions you represent. I am also grateful to all those who in numerous ways came to the aid of the Haitian people following that tragedy which left in its wake so much death, destruction and also desperation. Through the help given to our brothers and sisters in Haiti, we have shown that the Church is a great body, one in which the various members care for one another (cf. *1 Cor 12:25*). It is in this communion, prompted by the Holy Spirit, that our service to the Church finds its deepest motivation.

How much has been done toward rebuilding the country in these five years! Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that much remains to be done. All that has been done, and all that, with God's help, will yet be done, rests on three solid pillars: the human person, ecclesial communion, and the local Church.

The person is at the centre of the Church's activity. We have just celebrated Christmas, and it is precisely the Incarnation which tells us how important man is to God, who wished to assume our human nature. Our first concern must thus be that of helping everyone, each man and woman, to live fully as persons. There can be no true rebuilding of a country without also rebuilding each person in his or her totality. This means ensuring that the material needs of every person in Haiti be met, and that they be able to be free, to assume their responsibilities and to further their own spiritual and religious lives. The human person has a transcendent dimension, and the Church first of all cannot neglect this dimension, which finds its fulfilment in the encounter with God.

Consequently, in this phase of reconstruction, *humanitarian* and *pastoral* activities are not in competition with one another, but rather are complementary: each needs the other, and together they help Haitians to be mature persons and Christians capable of devoting themselves to the good of their brothers and sisters. May every form of assistance offered by the Church to Haiti have this concern for the integral good of the person!

A second fundamental aspect is that of *ecclesial communion*. Haiti has experienced effective cooperation between many ecclesial institutions – dioceses, religious institutes, charitable organizations – but also individual lay men and women. Each, in their own way, has carried out important charitable works. This variety of agencies, and thus of ways of offering assistance and development, is a positive factor, since it is a sign of the vitality of the Church and of the generosity of so many. For this too, we thank God, who has raised up in many a desire to be close to their neighbour and to follow in this manner the law of charity which is the heart of the Gospel. But charity is even yet more authentic and more incisive when it is lived in communion. Communion shows that charity is not merely about helping others, but is a dimension that permeates the whole of life and breaks down all those barriers of individualism which prevent us from encountering one another. Charity is the inner life of the Church and is manifested in ecclesial communion. Communion between bishops and with bishops, who are the first ones responsible for the service of charity. Communion among the various charisms and charitable institutions, since none of us works for or by themselves, but rather in the name of Christ who has shown us the way of service. It would be a contradiction to live charity apart from one another! This is not charity; charity is done as an ecclesial body, always. I invite you therefore to strengthen every possible means of working together. Ecclesial communion is reflected as well in collaboration with the civil authorities and international organizations, so that all may strive for authentic progress for the Haitian people, in the spirit of the common good.

Finally, I wish to underline the importance of *the local Church*, because it is here that the Christian experience is made tangible. The Church in Haiti must become always more alive and fruitful, to witness to Christ and to make its contribution to the development of the nation. In this regard, I would like to encourage the bishops of Haiti, all the priests and all those engaged in pastoral work of any kind, so that by their zeal and their fraternal communion they may inspire in the faithful renewed efforts in the area Christian formation and of joyful and fruitful evangelization. The witness of evangelical charity is effective when it is sustained by personal relationship with Jesus in prayer, in listening to the word of God, and in the reception of the Sacraments. This is the true “strength” of the local Church.

Renewing to each of you my heartfelt gratitude, I urge you to continue along the path you have begun, and I assure you of my continued prayers and my blessing. May Mary our Mother guide and protect you. I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you.

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