



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS
TO NOMADELFIA, IN THE DIOCESE OF GROSSETO,
TO MEET THE COMMUNITY FOUNDED BY DON ZENO SALTINI;
AND TO LOPPIANO (FLORENCE) IN THE DIOCESE OF FIESOLE,
TO VISIT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT

MEETING WITH THE COMMUNITY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS

Parvis of the Mary Theotokos Shrine (Loppiano)

Thursday, 10 May 2018

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear Brother Bishops, Authorities, and all of you,

Thank you for your welcome! I greet each and every one of you, and I thank Maria Voce for her introduction ... everything is clear, very clear! You can see that she has clear ideas!

I am very happy to be here among you today in Loppiano, this “citadel”, known in the world because it was born from the Gospel and seeks to be nourished by the Gospel. And for this reason it is recognized as a proper city of choice and of inspiration by those who are disciples of Jesus, even by brothers and sisters of other religions and convictions. In Loppiano everyone feels at home!

I wished to visit it also because, as emphasized by the woman who inspired it, the Servant of God Chiara Lubich, it seeks to be an illustration of the mission of the Church today, as outlined by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. And I am happy to dialogue with you in order to focus ever

more closely on listening to God's design, the plan of Loppiano at the service of the new stage of witnessing to and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus to which the Holy Spirit calls us today.

I have learned of the questions; that is understood! And now I will respond to the questions. I have included all of them here.

Inspired by the words of Maria Voce, who spoke about reciprocal love as the "law" of Loppiano, the Pope was asked how to live and renew each day this prophetic consignment left by Chiara Lubich.

The first question comes from you "pioneers" of Loppiano who, over 50 years ago and then gradually in the subsequent decades, were the first to leave your lands, your homes and your jobs to come here and spend your life fulfilling this dream. First of all, thank you. Thank you for what you have done. Thank you for your faith in Jesus. He is the one who has performed this miracle, and you [have placed in him] your faith. And faith allows Jesus to do his work. For this reason faith makes miracles, because it leaves room for Jesus, and he performs miracles, one after another. Such is life!

To you "pioneers", and to all the residents of Loppiano, it comes to me spontaneously to say the words that the Letter to the Hebrews addresses to a Christian community that was living a phase of its journey similar to yours. The Letter to the Hebrews states: "recall the former days when, after you received the light of Christ, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.... Indeed, you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence" — your *parrhesia*, it says — "which has a great reward. For you only have need of endurance" — *hypomone* is the word it uses, that is bearing on the shoulders the daily burden —, "so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised" (cf. 10:32-36).

They are two key words, but in the framework of memory. That "deuteronomic" dimension of life: memory. I do not say a Christian, but when a man or woman locks the key to memory, he or she begins to die. Please, memory. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: "recall the former days". With this framework of memory one can live, one can breathe, one can go forward and bear fruit. But if you have no memory.... Fruit is possible from the tree because the tree has roots: it is not uprooted. But if you have no memory, you are uprooted, eradicated, there will be no fruit. Memory: this is the framework of life.

Here are two key words of the journey of the Christian community in this text: *parrhesia* and *hypomone*. Courage, candour, and to endure, to persevere, to bear the daily burden on the shoulders. In the New Testament, *parrhesia* describes the style of life of Jesus' disciples: courage and sincerity in bearing witness to the truth along with trust in God and in his mercy. Prayer, too, must also be done with *parrhesia*. Saying things to God "to his face", with courage.

Think about how our father Abraham prayed, when he had the courage to ask God to “negotiate” on the number of righteous people in Sodom. “If there were 30? ... And if there were 25? ... And if there were 15?”. That courage to challenge God! And the courage of Moses, God’s great friend, who tells Him to his face: “If you destroy this people, you destroy me as well”. Courage. Challenge God in prayer. It takes *parrhesia*: *parrhesia* in life, in action, and also in prayer.

Parrhesia expresses the essential quality in Christian life: having the heart turned to God, believing in his love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), because his love casts out all false apprehension, all temptation to hide oneself in quiet living, in ‘respectability’ or even in subtle hypocrisy. All are woodworms that destroy the soul. It is important to ask the Holy Spirit for candour, courage, *parrhesia* — always linked to respect and kindness — in witnessing to God’s great and beautiful works, which he fulfils in us and through us. And also in the relationships within the community it is important to always be sincere, open, frank, neither fearful nor listless nor hypocrites. No, be open. Do not stand apart, in order to sow discord, to gossip, but force yourself to live as sincere and courageous disciples in charity and truth. You know this sowing discord destroys the Church, destroys the community, destroys your very life, because it poisons you too. And I like to say — I see it this way — that those who live off gossip, who always go about whispering about one another, are “terrorists”, because they speak ill of others. But speaking ill of someone in order to destroy them is doing what a terrorist does: he takes the bomb, drops it, destroys, and then calmly goes away. No. Be open, constructive, courageous in charity.

And then the other word: *hypomone*, which we can translate as to withstand, to endure.

Remaining and learning to abide the demanding situations that life presents us. With this term the Apostle Paul expresses perseverance and steadfastness in carrying out God’s choice and new life in Christ. It is about holding firm to this choice even at the expense of difficulties and setbacks, knowing that this perseverance, this tenacity and this patience produce hope. So says Paul. And hope does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:3-5). Keep this in mind: hope never disappoints! It never disappoints! For the Apostle, the foundation of perseverance is God’s love, poured into our hearts through the gift of the Spirit, a love that precedes us and enables us to live with tenacity, serenity, positivity, imagination, ... and even with a little humour, even in the most difficult times. Ask for the grace of humour. It is the human attitude that is closest to God’s grace. A sense of humour. I met a holy priest, awash with commitments — he kept going and going ... — but he never stopped smiling. And since he had this sense of humour, those who knew him said about him: “he is able to laugh at others, to laugh at himself, and even to laugh at his own shadow! Humour is like this!

The Letter to the Hebrews also invites us to “recall the former days”, that is, to re-ignite in the heart and in the mind the ardour of the experience from which it was all born.

Chiara Lubich felt spurred by God to establish Loppiano — and then the other citadels that have sprung up in various parts of the world — one day, while contemplating the Benedictine Einsiedeln Abbey, with its church and cloister of monks, but also with the library, carpenters workshop,

fields.... There, in the abbey, God is at the centre of life, in prayer and in the celebration of the Eucharist, from which fraternity, work, culture, the irradiation of the light and social energy of the Gospel emanate and are nourished. And thus Chiara, contemplating the abbey, was spurred to bring something similar to life, in a new and modern form, in harmony with [Vatican II](#), beginning with the charism of unity: a blueprint for a new city in the spirit of the Gospel.

A city in which above all the beauty of the People of God stands out in the richness and variety of its members, of diverse vocations, of social and cultural expressions, each one in dialogue and at the service of all. A city that whose heart is in the Eucharist, the source of unity and of life ever new, and which presents itself to the eyes of those who visit it also in its lay, workday, inclusive and open role: with working the land, the activities of business and of industry, training schools, homes for hospitality and for the elderly, art studios, music complexes, modern means of communication....

A family in which all are recognized as sons and daughters of the one Father, committed to living the commandment of mutual love among themselves and toward others. Not to take it easy, set apart from the world, but to go out, to encounter, to care, to throw Gospel leaven by the handful into the dough of society, above all where it is needed most, where the joy of the Gospel is awaited and invoked: in poverty, in suffering, in trials, in searching, in doubt.

The charism of unity is a providential stimulus and a powerful support for experiencing this evangelical mystic of 'the we', that is, walking together in the history of the men and women of our time as "of one heart and soul" (cf. Acts 4:32), discovering and loving concretely those "members of one another" (cf. Rom 12:5). Jesus prayed to the Father for this: "that they may all be one as you and I are one (cf. Jn 17:21), and in himself he showed us the way, up to the complete gift of all in the abyssal emptying of the cross (cf. Mk 15:34; Phil 2:6-8). It is the spirituality of 'the we'. For fun, you can test yourselves, and others too, for fun. A priest who is here — more or less hidden — gave me this test. He said to me: "tell me, father, what is the contrary of 'I', the opposite of 'me'?" And I fell into the trap, and immediately I said: "you". And he told me: "No, the contrary of all individualism, both of 'I' and of 'you', is 'we'. The opposite is 'we'". This is the spirituality of 'the we' that you must carry forward, which saves us from all selfishness and all egotistical interest. The spirituality of 'the we'.

It is not only a spiritual fact, but a concrete reality with formidable results — if we live it and if we authentically and courageously affirm its various dimensions — at the social, cultural, political, economic levels.... Jesus redeemed not only the individual person, but also social relations (cf. [Evangelii Gaudium, n. 178](#)). Taking this fact seriously means moulding a new face of the city of men according to God's loving plan.

Loppiano is called to be this. And it can seek, with trust and realism, to become so ever better. This is essential. And from here it is important always to set out anew.

This is the response to the first question: always set out anew, but from this reality, which is living. Not from theories, no. From reality, from how one lives. And when reality is lived authentically, it is truly a link in this chain that helps us to go forward.

In the second question the Pontiff was asked what “fresh and creative contribution” can be developed by the training schools present in Loppiano and at an academic institution such as the Sophia University Institute “in order to build leadership capable of opening new paths”.

In Loppiano you live the experience of walking together, with a synodal style, as the People of God. And this is the sound and indispensable foundation underlying everything: the school of the People of God where he who teaches and leads is the one Master (cf. Mt 23:10), and where the dynamic is that of mutual listening and the exchange of gifts among all.

From here they may draw new impulse, enriching themselves with the creativity of love and opening themselves to the invitation of the Spirit and of history, the pathways of formation that have blossomed in Loppiano from the charism of unity: spiritual formation for the various vocations; formation for work, for economic and political action; formation for dialogue in its various ecumenical and interreligious expressions and with people of different convictions; ecclesial and cultural formation. And this in service to all, with the gaze that embraces all of humanity, beginning with those who in whatever way are relegated to the peripheries of existence. Loppiano, an open city; Loppiano, an outward bound city. In Loppiano there are no peripheries.

It is a great richness to be able to make all these educational centres available in Loppiano. It is a great richness! I recommend that you give them new impetus, opening them on broader horizons and launching them at the frontiers. In particular, it is essential to develop the formative project that connects the single paths which concretely touch children, young people, families, people with different vocations. May the foundation and the key be the “formative pact” which is at the base of every one of these pathways and which has its privileged method in closeness and in dialogue. And here there is a word that for me, too, is key: “closeness”. One cannot be a Christian without being close, without having an attitude of closeness, because closeness is what God offered when he sent the Son. First God created it when he led the people of Israel and asked the people: “Tell me, have you ever seen another people who had gods as close to them as I am close to you?”. This is what God asks. Proximity, closeness. And then, when he sends the Son to draw closer — one of us — to draw closer. This word is key in Christianity and in your charism. Closeness.

Furthermore, it is important to train oneself to use the three languages together: of the mind, of the heart and of the hands. It is necessary, that is, to learn to think well, to listen well and to work well. Yes, work too, because — as written by Fr Pasquale Foresi, who played a central role in realizing the Loppiano project — it “is not only a means of living, but is something inherent to our being human persons, and therefore also a means for knowing reality, understanding life: it is a real and effective instrument of human formation”. This is important — the three languages — because we

have inherited from the Enlightenment this unhealthy idea that education means filling the head with concepts. And the more you know, the better you will be. No. Education must touch the mind, the heart and the hands. Educate to think well, not just to learn concepts, but to think well; educate to empathize well; educate to do good. In such a way that these three languages may be interconnected: so that you think what you feel and do; you feel what you think and do; you do what you feel and think, in unity. This is educating.

Attesting to the decisiveness and wide-scale implementation of this promising commitment are two of the initiatives to emerge in Loppiano in recent years: the entrepreneurial “Polo Lionello Bonfanti” centre for training and dissemination of the Civil Economy and of Communion; and the Holy See-established Sophia University Institute’s cutting edge academic experience, of which a local headquarters — I am really happy about this — will soon be open in Latin America.

It is important that there be a university centre in Loppiano intended for those — as its name says — who seek Wisdom and have as their objective the building of a culture of unity. Culture of unity. I did not say ‘uniformity’. No. Uniformity is the opposite of unity! It reflects, beginning from its founding inspiration, the lines that I outlined in the recent Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, inviting a wise and courageous renewal of academic studies in order to offer a competent and prophetic contribution to the missionary transformation of the Church and to the vision of our planet as a unique homeland and of humanity as a unique people, made up of many peoples who inhabit a common home.

Go forth, forward, this way!

In the third and final question one of the migrants welcomed in Loppiano asked Francis what their “mission in the phase of the new evangelization” is and what responses to give “to the challenges of our time as an occasion of growth for all”.

I would like to lift my gaze toward the horizon and invite you to raise yours together with me, to look with trusting faithfulness and with generous creativity toward the future which indeed begins today.

The history of Loppiano is but at the beginning. You are at the beginning. It is a small seed cast into the furrows of history and already sprouting and thriving, but it must root itself firmly and bear substantial fruit, at the service of the mission of the message and the incarnation of the Gospel of Jesus which the Church is called to live today. And this requires humility, openness, synergy, a capacity to risk. We must use all of this: humility and a capacity to risk, together, openness and synergy.

The often dramatic needs of those who challenge us from all sides cannot leave us calm, but demand the maximum from us, always trusting in the grace of God.

In the epochal change that we are experiencing — it is not an epoch of change but a change of epoch — it is important to be committed not only to the encounter among people, cultures and peoples and to a coalition among civilizations, but to overcome together the epochal challenge of building a shared culture of encounter and a global civilization of coalition. Like a colourful rainbow in which the white light of God's love is in array. And to do this it takes men and women — young people, families, people of all vocations and professions — capable of opening new paths to follow together. The Gospel is always new, always. And in this Time of Easter the Church has so often told us that Jesus' Resurrection brings us youthfulness and encourages us to ask for this renewed youthfulness. Always go forward with creativity.

The challenge is that of creative faithfulness: being faithful to the original inspiration and together being open to the breath of the Holy Spirit and bravely setting out on the new paths that he inspires. To me — and I advise you to do so — the greatest example is what we can read in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles: seeing how they were able to remain faithful to Jesus' teaching and to have the courage to often appear "foolish", because they did so, going everywhere. Why? They knew how to conjugate this creative faithfulness. Read this text of Scripture, not once, [but] two, three, four, five or six times, because there you will find the way of this creative faithfulness. The Holy Spirit, not our good sense, not our pragmatic abilities, not our ever limited ways of seeing. No, going forth with the breath of the Spirit.

But how can one meet and follow the Holy Spirit? By practicing discernment as a community. That is, by gathering in assembly around the Risen Jesus, the Lord and Master, to hear what the Spirit tells us today as a Christian community (cf. Rev 2:7) and to discover together, in this atmosphere, the call that God lets us hear in the historical situation in which we are living the Gospel.

It is necessary to listen to God to the point of hearing with him the cry of the People, and it is necessary to listen to the People to the point of breathing the will to which God calls us. Disciples of Jesus must be contemplative of the Word and contemplative of the People of God.

We are all called to become artisans of community discernment. It is not easy to do this, but we must do so if we wish to have this creative faithfulness and if we wish to be docile to the Spirit. This is the way that Loppiano too may discover and follow, step by step, the way of God at the service of the Church and of society.

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Before concluding, I offer thanks once again to all of you for the welcome and the celebration!

And with this, a last heartfelt thing I would tell you. We are gathered here before the *Mary Theotokos* Shrine. We are under Mary's gaze. Even in this there is a harmony between [Vatican II](#) and the charism of the Focolari whose official name for the Church is 'Work of Mary'.

On 21 November 1964, at the conclusion of the third Session of the Council, Blessed [Paul VI](#) proclaimed Mary 'Mother of the Church'. This year I myself wished to establish the liturgical memorial which will be celebrated for the first time this 21 May, the Monday after Pentecost.

Mary is the Mother of Jesus and is, in Him, the Mother of all of us: the Mother of unity. The Shrine dedicated to her here in Loppiano is an invitation to place ourselves in the school of Mary in order to learn to know Jesus, to live with Jesus and of Jesus present in each one of us and among us.

And do not forget that Mary was a lay woman; she was a lay woman. Jesus' first disciple, his mother, was a lay woman. There is great inspiration here. And a good exercise that we can do — I challenge you to do it — is to read [in the Gospel] the most conflicting episodes of Jesus' life and see — as in Cana, for example — how Mary acts. Mary speaks and intervenes. "But, Father, [these episodes] are not all in the Gospel...". And you imagine, imagine that the Mother was there, that she had seen this.... How would Mary have reacted to this? This is a true school for going forward. Because she is the woman of faithfulness, the woman of creativity, the woman of courage, of *parrhesia*, the woman of patience, the woman of forbearance. Always look to this, this lay woman, Jesus' first disciple, how she reacted in all the conflicting episodes of her son's life. It will really help you.

And do not forget to pray for me because I need it. Thank you.