



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO L'AQUILA

GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS, THE AUTHORITIES AND CITIZENS PRESENT IN THE SQUARE

*Parvis of the Duomo
Sunday, 28 August 2022*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, and happy Sunday!

I am happy to be here among you. And I thank the Cardinal Archbishop for the greeting he extended to me on behalf of everyone. Along with all of you here present, I affectionately embrace the entire city and the diocese of L'Aquila. I thank you for being here, the authorities as well, the prisoners, the children, of everyone – the People of God.

At this moment in which I meet with you, especially with the relatives of the victims of the earthquake, I would like to express my nearness to your families and your entire community, who with great dignity has faced the consequences of that tragic event.

Above all, I thank all of you for your witness of faith – even amidst pain and confusion, which is a part of our faith as pilgrims, you fixed your eyes on Christ, crucified and risen, who with his love has redeemed the non-sense of suffering and death. And I think of one of you who wrote to me a while back, saying to me that they had lost their only two adolescent children. And there are so many more like that person. And Jesus placed you back in the arms of the Father, who does not let even one tear fall in vain, not even one!, but who gathers them all in his merciful heart.

In that heart are written all the names of your loved ones who have passed from time into eternity.

Communion with them is more alive than ever. Death cannot destroy love, which the Liturgy for the Dead reminds us: "Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended" (Preface I For the Dead). But the pain remains, and beautiful words help, but the pain remains. And the pain does not go away with words. Only through closeness, friendship, affection – walking together, helping each other as brothers and sisters and moving forward. Either we are a people of God or painful problems like this are not resolved.

I congratulate you for the care with which you have created the Memorial Chapel. Memory is the strength of a people, and when this memory is enlightened by faith, that people does not remain prisoners of the past, but walks, and walks in the present directed toward the future, always remaining attached to its roots, treasuring its past experiences, good and bad. And with this treasure and with these experiences, move forward! All of you, people of L'Aquila, have demonstrated a resilient character. Being rooted in your Christian and social traditions enabled you to withstand the shock of the earthquake and to begin the courageous and patient work of reconstruction immediately.

Everything had to be reconstructed: houses, schools, churches. But, you know well, this is done along with the spiritual, cultural and social reconstruction of the civic and ecclesial community.

After a tragedy, personal and collective rebirth is a gift of Grace, and is also the fruit of the commitment of each and every person, *together*. I underline this "together", not in small groups, no, together, everyone together. It is essential to activate and reinforce the organic collaboration, in synergy, of institutions and associations – a hard-working harmony, a long-term commitment because we are working for our children, for our grandchildren, for the future.

In the work of reconstruction, the churches merit special attention. They are the patrimony of the community, not only in a historical and cultural sense, but also in terms of identity. Those stones are imbued with the faith and values of the people, and these places of worship are also dynamic places in their lives and for their hope.

And regarding hope, I would like to greet and thank the delegation from the Abruzzi world of prisons present here. In you too, I hail a sign of hope, because even in prisons there are many, too many, victims. You here today are a sign of hope for human and social reconstruction. Thank you!

I extend a greeting to all of you and cordially bless you, your families and every citizen.

Jemonnanzi!