



The Holy See

MEETING WITH THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILGRIMAGE OF GYPSIES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 26 October 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome and greet you all cordially. I thank Cardinal Antonio Maria Vegliò for his words and for having organized this event in collaboration with: the “*Migrantes*” Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference; the “*Migrantes*” Office of the Diocese of Rome and the Sant’Egidio Community.

Dear gypsy friends, *o Del si tumentsa!* [“The Lord be with you!”]

Many of you come from afar and have undertaken a long journey to come here. Welcome! I thank you for wishing to commemorate together the historic meeting of [Blessed Paul VI](#) with the nomadic people. Fifty years have passed since he came to visit you in the Camp at Pomezia. The Pope spoke to your grandparents and parents with fatherly care, saying: “Wherever you stop you are considered a bother and a stranger [...] Here not so; [...] here you find someone who loves you, esteems you, appreciates you and assists you” (cf. *Insegnamenti* III [1965], n. 491). With these words, he spurred the Church to a pastoral commitment with your people, encouraging you too at the same time to trust her. From that day until now, we have witnessed great changes, both in the field of evangelization, and in that of the human, social and cultural promotion of your community. We heard Dr Peter Pollák talk about his experience, and how this way must be promoted and continue to be promoted.

A strong sign of faith and spiritual growth of your ethnic groups is the ever-increasing number of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life. With us here today is Bishop

Devprasad Ganawa, he too is a son of this people. Dear consecrated men and women, your brothers and sisters look with trust and hope to you and to the role you carry out, and all that you can do in the process of reconciliation within society and the Church. You are a link between two cultures and, therefore, you are asked to be witnesses of evangelical transparency to foster the birth, growth and care of new vocations. Accompany them not only on their spiritual journey but also in the routine of their daily life with all its toils, joys and concerns.

I know the difficulties of your people. Having visited some parishes on the outskirts of Rome, I have been able to understand your problems, your anxieties, and I have seen that these issues require the attention not only of the Church but also of the local authorities. I have been able to see the precarious conditions in which many of you live, due to negligence and unemployment and the lack of the necessary means of subsistence. This is contrary to the right of every person to a dignified life, to dignified work, to education and to health care. According to the moral and social order, every human being must be able to enjoy his fundamental rights and fulfil his duties. On this basis it is possible to build peaceful coexistence, in which the different cultures and traditions protect their respective values, not by adopting a closed or opposing attitude, but through dialogue and integration. We no longer want to witness family tragedies in which children die from cold or are burnt alive, or become objects in the hands of depraved persons, or in which young people and women are involved in the trafficking of drugs or of human beings. And this happens because we often fall prey to indifference and are unable to accept customs and ways of life that are different from our own.

I also hope that your people may start a new phase, a renewed history, so as to turn the page! The time has come to put an end to age-old prejudices, preconceptions and mutual mistrust that are often at the base of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. No one must feel isolated, and no one is authorized to trample on the dignity and rights of others. It is the spirit of mercy that calls us to fight in order to guarantee all these values. Therefore, let us allow the Gospel of mercy to shake our consciences and let us open our hearts and our hands to the neediest and most marginalized, beginning with the ones closest to us. In today's cities in which so much individualism is breathed, I urge you first and foremost to commit yourselves to build more human peripheries, strong bonds of fraternity and sharing; you have this responsibility, it is also your task. And you can do it if you are first of all good Christians, avoiding everything that is not worthy of this name: falsehood, fraud, cheating, quarrels. You have the example of Bl. Zeffirino Giménez Malla, a son of your people, who distinguished himself by his virtues, humility and honesty, and by his great devotion to Our Lady, a devotion that led him to martyrdom and to be known as the "Martyr of the Rosary". I hold him up to you again today as a model of life and religiosity, also because of the cultural and ethnic ties that link you to him.

Dear friends, do not give the media and public opinion any motive to speak ill of you. You yourselves are the protagonists of your present and of your future. Like all citizens, you can contribute to the wellbeing and the progress of society, respecting the laws, fulfilling your duties

and integrating yourselves also through the emancipation of each new generation. I see here in the hall many young people and many children: they are the future of your people but also of the society in which they live. Children are your most precious treasure. Today your culture is in a phase of change; technological development renders your youth increasingly aware of their potential and their dignity, and they themselves feel the need to work for the personal human advancement of your people. This calls for their being assured of adequate schooling. You must demand this: it is a right!

Education is certainly the basis for a person's healthy development. It is well known that the poor level of schooling of many of your young people today is the main obstacle to their access to the world of work. Your children have the right to go to school; do not prevent them from going! Your children have the right to go to school! It is important that the impetus to better education come from the family, come from the parents, come from the grandparents; it is the task of adults to ensure that the young ones attend school. Access to education will enable your young people to become active citizens, to participate in the political, social and economic life in their respective countries.

Civil institutions are called upon to guarantee appropriate training courses for young gypsies, giving families that live in the most difficult conditions the possibility to attend school and enter the world of work. The integration process challenges society to learn about the culture, history and values of the gypsy populations. May your culture and your values be known by all!

Many times, also on behalf of [St John Paul II](#) and [Benedict XVI](#), you have been assured of the affection and encouragement of the Church. Now I would like to conclude with the words of [Bl. Paul VI](#), who assured you: "You are not on the margins of the Church, but, under certain aspects, you are at the centre, you are at the heart. You are at the heart of the Church" (*ibid.*, n. 491-492). Mary is also in this heart, venerated by you as Our Lady of the Gypsies, whom we will shortly crown again to recall Pope Montini's gesture 50 years ago. I entrust you, your families and your future to her and to Bl. Zeffirino. And please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.