



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO CESENA ON THE THIRD CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF POPE PIUS VI
AND BOLOGNA FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE DIOCESAN EUCHARISTIC CONFERENCE

**VISIT TO THE RECEPTION CENTRE "HUB REGIONALE" IN VIA ENRICO MATTEI:
ENCOUNTER WITH MIGRANTS AND CARE WORKERS**

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Bologna

Sunday, 1 October 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you cordially and I wish to assure you of my closeness. I wanted my first meeting in Bologna to take place here. This is the “port” of arrival for those who come from very far away places and through sacrifices, which at times, you are not even able to recount.

Many people do not know you and they are afraid. This makes them feel they have the right to judge and to do so harshly and coldly, also thinking that they see things clearly. But that is not so. One can only see well through closeness which brings mercy. Without this, other people remain strangers, even enemies, and cannot become our neighbours. From a distance we can think and do anything, as easily happens when dreadful comments and insults are posted on the Internet. If we look at our neighbours without mercy, we cannot understand their suffering and difficulties. And if we look at our neighbours without mercy, we also run the risk of God looking at us without mercy. Today, I see only a great desire for friendship and help. I would like to thank the institutions and all the volunteers for their attention and commitment in taking care of those of you who are guests here. In you, as in every foreigner who knocks on our door, I see Jesus Christ who identifies with the foreigner of every age and condition, whether welcomed or rejected (cf. Mt

25:35-43).

This phenomenon requires vision and great determination in management; intelligence and facilities, as well as clear policies that do not permit distortion or exploitation, which are even more unacceptable when applied to the poor. I believe it is truly necessary that a greater number of countries adopt private and community-based support programmes of welcome, and open humanitarian corridors for refugees in difficult situations, in order to avoid unbearably long waiting periods and loss of time which can be misleading. Integration begins with knowledge. Contact with others leads to the discovery of the “secret” which each of us carries within us and also the gift that it represents, to opening up to them and accepting their positive characteristics, attributes, thus learning to love them and overcoming fear, helping them to integrate into the new community which welcomes them. The lady who accompanied me said each of you has a story. And this story is something holy. We must respect, accept and welcome it and help you to keep going. Some of you are minors: these young boys and girls are in special need of tenderness and have the right to protection which provides temporary lodging and foster-care programmes.

I come among you because I want to bring your eyes into mine — I have seen your eyes —, your hearts into mine. I want to keep your faces with me which ask to be remembered, helped, I would say “adopted”, because after all, you are searching for someone who will put their stakes on you and trust you, help you find that future which you hoped in, and that hope brought you all the way here to find.

Do you know what you are? You are “fighters of hope”! Some of you did not make it here because they were swallowed by the desert or by the sea. People do not remember them, but God knows their names and he welcomes them beside him. Let us keep a moment of silence to remember them and pray for them. [silence]. To you, fighters of hope, I hope that your hopes will not delude you or worse, turn into despair, thanks to the many who help you not to lose it. I would like to carry in my heart your fears, your difficulties, your risks, uncertainties also many slogans: “Help us get some documents”; and the people you love, who are close to you and for whom you began the search for a future. Bearing you in our eyes and hearts will help us to work harder to build a welcoming city that is able to create opportunities for all. I therefore exhort you to be open to this city’s culture, prepared to walk the path indicated by this country’s laws.

The Church is a mother who does not make any distinctions and who loves each one as a child of God, in his image. Bologna is a city which has always been known for being welcoming. This has been reconfirmed in many experiences of solidarity and hospitality in parishes and religious contexts, but also in many families and in various social associations. Some have found a new brother to help or a child to raise. And some have found new parents who want a better future to give them. How I wish that these experiences, which are possible for everyone, may multiply. May the city have no fear of giving the five loaves of bread and the two fish: Providence will intervene and everyone will be satisfied.

Bologna was the first city in Europe to free servants from slavery, about 760 years ago or so. They numbered precisely 5,855. So many! And yet, Bologna was not afraid. They were ransomed by the Municipality, actually, by the city. Perhaps they also did this for economic reasons, because freedom helps everyone and suits everyone. They were not afraid to welcome those who were considered “not people” and to recognise them as “human beings”. They recorded the name of each of them in a book! How I wish that your names were also written down and remembered, so that together, we may find a common future, as happened then, a common future.

I thank you and impart my heartfelt blessing to you. And please pray for me.