



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT

TO SANTA MARIA DI LEUCA AND BRINDISI (APULIA - ITALY)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO THE LOCAL POPULATION AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Lenio Flacco Square, Brindisi

Saturday, 14 June 2008

Mr Minister,

Mr Mayor and Distinguished Authorities,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like first of all to express my joy at being in your midst and I greet you all very warmly. I thank the Hon. Raffaele Fitto, Minister for Regional Affairs, who has conveyed the Government's greeting to me and I thank the Mayor of Brindisi for his fervent words of welcome on behalf of all the citizens, as well as for his kind gift. I greet and thank with affection the young man who spoke on behalf of the youth of Brindisi. I know, dear young people, that you animated the assembly while awaiting my arrival and that you will continue at a prayer vigil, with which you desire to prepare for the Eucharistic celebration tomorrow. I cordially greet Archbishop Rocco Talucci, your Pastor, Archbishop emeritus Settimio Todisco, the priests, the men and women religious and all those present.

Here I am among you, dear friends! I very gladly accepted the invitation of your diocesan community's Pastor and I am glad to visit this city of yours which, while playing an important role in the context of Southern Italy, is called to project its image beyond the Adriatic Sea to communicate with other cities and other peoples. Actually, Brindisi was once a place from which traders, legionaries, students and pilgrims embarked for the East and it remains a door open on the sea. In recent years, the newspapers and television have shown pictures of refugees from Croatia and from Montenegro, from Albania and from Macedonia who landed in Brindisi. I believe it is only right to remember with gratitude the efforts made, which are still being made, by the Civil and Military

Administrations in collaboration with the Church and with various humanitarian organizations to provide shelter and assistance for them despite the financial difficulties which, unfortunately, continue to be a cause of concern particularly to your Region. Your City has been and continues to be generous and this merit was justly recognized by the assignment, in the context of international solidarity, of an authentic institutional role: indeed it hosts the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot, run by United Nations' World Food Programme.

Dear People of Brindisi, this solidarity is part of the virtues which make up your rich civil and religious patrimony: continue with a renewed impetus to build your future together. Among the values that have taken root in your region I would like to recall respect for life and, especially, attachment to the family, today exposed to the converging attacks of numerous forces that seek to undermine it. How necessary and urgent it is, in the face of these challenges too, for all people of good will to strive to safeguard the family, the solid basis on which to build the life of society as a whole! Your society is also founded on the Christian faith which your ancestors considered as one of the elements that qualified the identity of the people of Brindisi. May adherence to the Gospel, consciously renewed and lived with responsibility, spur you today, as in the past, to face the difficulties and challenges of the present time with confidence. May faith encourage you to respond without compromise to your city's legitimate expectations of the human and social advancement. The new University, called to serve those who are aware of their dignity and tasks and who desire to play an active part in life, cannot fail to make its own contribution to the economic, political, cultural and religious development of the territory. Dear People of Brindisi, so that the culture of solidarity may increase in your City, serve one another, letting yourselves be guided by an authentic spirit of brotherhood. God is with you and will not let you be deprived of the constant support of his grace.

I would now like to address in particular the many young people present. Dear friends, thank you for your warm welcome, thank you for the fervent sentiments expressed by your representative. Your voices, which find an immediate correspondence in my heart, communicate to me your trusting exuberance and your will to live. I also perceive in them the problems that assail you which sometimes risk stifling the enthusiasm typical of this season of your life. I am aware, in particular, of the burden that weighs upon many of you and upon your future because of the dramatic phenomenon of unemployment which primarily affects the young men and women of Southern Italy. Likewise, I know that your youth is threatened by the demand for easy earnings, by the temptation to seek refuge in artificial paradises or to let yourselves be attracted by distorted forms of material satisfaction. Do not let yourselves be caught in the snares of evil! Rather, seek an existence rich in values in order to give life to a society that is more just and more open to the future. Bring to fruition the gifts with which God has endowed your youth: strength, intelligence, courage, enthusiasm and determination to live. On the basis of these attributes, relying always on divine support, you will be able to nourish hope within you and around you. It is up to you and to your hearts to ensure that progress is transformed into a greater good for all. And the way of good - as you know - has a name: it is called love.

The key to every hope is found in love, solely in authentic love, because love is rooted in God. We read in the Bible: "We know and believe the love God has for us. God is love" (1 Jn 4: 16). And God's love has the sweet and compassionate Face of Jesus Christ. Here then we have reached the heart of the Christian message: Christ is the response to your questions and problems; in him every honest aspiration of the human being is strengthened. Christ, however, is demanding and shuns half measures. He knows he can count on your generosity and coherence; for this reason he expects a lot of you. Follow him faithfully and, in order to encounter him love his Church, feel responsible, do not avoid being courageous protagonists, each in his own context. Here is a point to which I would like to call your attention: seek to know the Church, to understand and love her, paying attention to the voice of her Pastors. She is made up of human beings, but Christ is her Head and his Spirit firmly guides her. You are the youthful face of the Church so do not fail to make your contribution in order that the Gospel she proclaims may spread everywhere. Be apostles of your peers!

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you once again for your welcome. I have read several letters sent to me by young people of your Province. I learned from them, dear friends, to understand your situation better. Thank you for your affection. I assure you and all the people of Brindisi of my prayers that you may witness to the Gospel message of peace and justice. May Mary, *Regina Apuliae*, protect you and accompany you always. I warmly bless you and wish you all a good night!

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