



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE SACRARIUM OF THE FOSSE ARDEATINE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Fosse Ardeatine

Third Sunday of Lent, 27 March 2011

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I very gladly accepted the invitation of the National Association of the Italian Families of the Martyrs who died for the freedom of the Homeland to come on pilgrimage to this Sacram, dear to all Italians and in particular to the people of Rome. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Chief Rabbi, the President of the Association, the General Commissioner, the Director of the Mausoleum and especially the families of the victims, as well as everyone present.

“I believe in God and in Italy / I believe in the resurrection / of the martyrs and heroes / I believe in the rebirth / of the homeland and in the / freedom of the people”. These words were carved on the wall of a torture cell in Via Tasso in Rome during the Nazi occupation. They are the testament of an unknown person who was imprisoned in that cell and show that the human spirit remains free even in the harshest conditions.

“I believe in God and in Italy”: these words struck me too because this year is the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy, but especially because they affirm the primacy of faith, from which to draw trust and hope for Italy and for its future. What happened here on 24 March 1944 gravely offended God, because it was the deliberate violence of man against man. This is a most detestable effect of war, of every war, whereas God is life, peace and communion.

Like my Predecessors, I have come here to pray and to refresh my memory. I have come to

invoke divine Mercy which alone can fill the emptiness, the gulf opened by human beings when, driven by blind violence, they deny the very dignity of God's children, brothers and sisters of each other.

As Bishop of Rome, a city consecrated by the blood of the martyrs of the Gospel of Love, I also come to pay homage to these brethren, killed very close to the ancient catacombs.

"I believe in God and in Italy". In that testament carved in a place of violence and death, the bond between faith and love of the homeland appears in its full purity, without any rhetoric. Whoever wrote these words did so only out of deep conviction, as the extreme testimony to the truth believed, which makes the human soul royal even in extreme debasement. In this way every man is called to fulfil his own dignity: by testifying to this truth which each recognizes in conscience.

Another testimony impressed me and this was discovered actually inside the Fosse Ardeatine. It is a sheet of paper on which one of those who died had written: "God my great Father, we pray you that you may protect the Jews from barbarous persecution. One *Our Father*, two *Hail Marys*, one *Glory Be*". At that moment, so tragic, so inhuman, in that person's heart was the loftiest invocation: "God my great Father". Father of All! Just as the words on the lips of Jesus, dying on the Cross were "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". In that name, "Father", is the sure guarantee of hope; the possibility of a different future, free from hatred and revenge, a future of freedom and brotherhood, for Rome, for Italy, for Europe, for the world.

Yes, wherever they may be, on every continent, to whatever people they may belong, human beings are children of that Father who is in Heaven, they are brothers or sisters of all in humanity. However, this being a son and a brother is not easy. The Fosse Ardeatine also unfortunately demonstrate this. It is necessary to desire it, it is necessary to say "yes" to goodness and "no" to evil. It is necessary to believe in the God of love and of life and to reject every other false divine image that betrays his holy Name and consequently betrays man, made in his image.

Therefore, in this place, a sorrowful memorial of the most horrendous crime, the truest response is to take one another by the hand, as brothers and sisters, and to say: "Our Father, we believe in you and with the strength of your love we want to walk together, in peace, in Rome, in Italy, in Europe and throughout the world". Amen.