



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PRATO AND FLORENCE
(10 NOVEMBER 2015)

MEETING WITH THE WORLD OF LABOUR

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

Square in front of the Cathedral, Prato
Tuesday, 10 November 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I thank your pastor, Bishop Agostinelli for his most courteous words to me. I greet all of you with affection, including those unable to be here in person, particularly the sick and elderly people and those in custody in the correctional facility.

I have come as a pilgrim — a passing pilgrim...! It's not much, but at least the will is there — to this city rich in history and beauty, which in the course of the centuries has earned the description "City of Mary". You are fortunate because you are in good hands! They are motherly hands that always protect, that are open in order to welcome. You are also privileged because you safeguard the relic of the "Sacra Cintola" [Holy Girdle] of Our Lady, which I just had the opportunity to visit.

This sign of blessing for your city brings to my mind several thoughts which are also inspired by the Word of God. The first refers to the journey of salvation that the People of Israel undertook from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Before setting them free, the Lord asked them to celebrate the Passover meal and to eat it in a particular way: with "your loins girded" (Ex 12:11).

Girding your loins means *being ready, prepared to leave, to go out to embark on the journey*. The Lord asks us to do this today too, today more than ever: not to remain closed off in indifference but to open ourselves; for everyone to feel called and ready to leave something in order to reach someone with whom to share the joy of having met the Lord and also the struggle of walking on his path. We are asked to go out to get close to the men and women of our time. To be sure, going out means taking risks — going out means taking risks — but there is no faith without risk. A faith that thinks of itself and stays locked in the house is not faithful to the invitation of the Lord who calls his followers to take the initiative and to get involved without fear. In the face of the often whirling transformations of these last years, there is the danger of suffering from the turbine of events, losing the courage to seek the way. People then prefer the refuge of any safe port and refuse to put out into the deep on Jesus' word. But the Lord who desires to reach those who do not yet love him, urges us to continue. He wants renewed missionary zeal to be born within us and entrusts us with great responsibility. He asks the Church his bride to walk on today's uneven paths, to accompany those who have lost their way; to pitch tents of hope in which to welcome those who are injured and no longer expect anything of life. This is what the Lord asks of us.

At the same time he gives us an example, by coming close to us. In fact the Holy Girdle recalls Jesus' gesture at the paschal dinner when he laid aside his garments and girded himself as a servant and washed his disciples feet (cf. Jn 13:4; Lk 12:37). He did this so that we too should do it, just as he did. *We have been served by God who made himself our neighbour to serve in turn those who are close to us*. For a disciple of Jesus no neighbour can become distant. On the contrary, there are no distant people who are too far removed, but only neighbours to reach out to. I thank you for the constant efforts your community makes to integrate each person, opposing the culture of indifference and waste. In times marked by uncertainties and fears, your projects in support of the weakest and of families, whom you also strive to "adopt", are praiseworthy. While you are trying to find the best concrete possibilities for inclusion do not be downhearted in the face of difficulties. Do not resign yourselves before what seem to be difficult situations of coexistence; always be motivated by the wish to establish real "pacts of closeness". Here then, closeness! Coming close in order to do this.

There is yet another suggestion I would like to make to you. St Paul asks Christians to put on special armour, the armour of God. Indeed he tells them to clothe themselves in the necessary virtues to face our real enemies who are never others but rather "the spirits of evil". In this ideal armour, truth occupies the first place: "having girded your loins with truth", the Apostle writes (Eph 6:14). We must *gird ourselves with truth*. Nothing good can be founded in a web of lies or in the lack of transparency. It is not easy to always seek and choose truth; yet it is a vital decision that must make a deep mark on the life of each one and on that of society too, so that it may be more just, so that it may be more honest. The sacredness of every human being demands respect, acceptance and dignified work for each one. Dignified work! Allow me here to recall the five men and two women of Chinese citizenship who died two years ago because of a fire in the industrial district of Prato. They were living and sleeping in the same factory in which they worked; small

sleeping quarters had been put together from cardboard and plasterboard, using bunk beds to capitalize on the building's height. It was a tragedy of exploitation and inhuman living conditions. And this is not dignified work! The life of every community requires that the cancer of corruption, the cancer of exploiting humans and labour, and the poison of lawlessness be fought to the very end. Within ourselves and together with others let us never tire of fighting for truth and justice.

I encourage everyone, especially you young people — they told me that you young people took part in an all-night prayer vigil, yesterday.... Thank you, thank you! — never to give into pessimism and resignation. Mary is the one who, with prayer and love, in silent action, transformed the Sabbath of disappointment into the dawn of the Resurrection. If some feel weary and oppressed by the circumstances of life, let them trust in our Mother who is close to us and consoles, because she is Mother! She always heartens us and invites us to again put trust in God: his Son will not betray our expectations and will sow in hearts a hope that does not disappoint. Many thanks.