



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE TOWN OF CESI

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II**

Saturday, 3 January 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. After my visit to Annifo, here I am among you in Cesi, to embrace in spirit you and all the peoples of the Marches struck by the earthquake. I greet the Archbishop of Camerino and the President of the Regional Episcopal Conference, the Archbishop of Fermo; I greet the parish priest and the entire community of this town, which witnessed the destruction of almost all its homes. I extend a cordial wish to the inhabitants of the other centres, where churches and homes collapsed or have become unsafe. I go in spirit to all the families, to the sick, the elderly and the children. I would like to say to them all, especially to those who feel discouraged: *Take heart! Take heart! The Lord is near! The Pope is close to you!*

I have been close to you from the very beginning when I heard the news of this devastating earthquake. I prayed for you and continue to do so. But today I am here among you, even if for a short while, to show my solidarity with you. At the beginning of a new year, I come to you in the name of that God who chose to dwell in the midst of our frail humanity, to instill in it a hope that is new and unconquerable, because it is based on faith.

2. The trials of life make us aware of *our human precariousness*. They remind us that on earth we are merely sojourners, and our homeland is not here below but with God. At this Christmas season, however, the liturgy says repeatedly that God himself, the Creator and Lord of all things, is not far from us, even when the opposite seems true. He sympathizes with our suffering: he came to live among us, hiding himself in our human condition, because he wants to imbue it with love, the source and ultimate meaning of all life.

The Psalmist says: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea" (*Ps 46 [45]:2-3*). In the midst of all upheavals,

the believer never loses the awareness of the Lord's comforting presence. You too, dear brothers and sisters, with the strength his support, can not only materially rebuild your towns, but you will have the spiritual energy for an authentic interior and community renewal.

3. During the days that disrupted the peaceful working life of these lands, your peoples gave an exceptional witness of dignity, which aroused universal admiration. The material damage did not weaken your attachment to these areas. On the contrary, the decision taken by the vast majority of the earthquake victims to continue living in their own towns shows that the trial they underwent made their sense of identity and belonging even stronger.

An encouragement in this regard was certainly *the birth during these months of numerous babies*, which gladdened many of the communities struck by the earthquake. From here I would like to greet all the children who are a promise for the future and the life of these lands. I have already had the opportunity to meet some of them, and now from this small town in the Apennines I would like to address all the children of the Marches and Umbria. In the festive atmosphere of Christmas, my affectionate greeting and embrace go to them! Dear children, may the Lord bless you; may he make you grow good and courageous; may he grant you and your loved ones much serenity and joy.

Maybe years from now, these children born during the earthquake will learn from their parents: "You were born at the time of the earthquake, but you did not know a thing". See, that is the way life goes. I was born during the war between Poland and communist Russia, but did not know a thing. Yet I have always had great admiration and great gratitude for those who had confidence during that war and then triumphed. It was very important. It was 1920.

4. Next to the children are their parents: these are the families to whom I express my admiration for their determination and commitment in reacting to the difficult test of an intense and prolonged earthquake. Many of them live in emergency situations; they are in temporary lodgings. May these families never lack for support from all of us. In this regard, I cannot fail to emphasize *the surprisingly generous response* that the earthquake caused even from beyond the confines of the regions involved. In fact, dear brothers and sisters, over these months you have been able to count on a vast network of solidarity, which has made you feel less isolated.

Despite the difficult working conditions due both to the season and to problems of communication, the commitment of everyone has already made it possible to re-establish the most essential services in almost every town. Particularly significant was the presence of so many volunteers who came from all over Italy and who shared with the earthquake victims their hardships and anxieties, tragedies and hopes. The solidarity of so many people was likewise remarkable. In the most diverse ways they sent material assistance together with countless testimonies of spiritual closeness and affection. Among the various organizations involved in this work, I particularly encourage the work of *Caritas*, which co-ordinates the services of solidarity on behalf of the ecclesial community.

I would like to express my appreciation of all that has been done and I encourage the authorities concerned to continue on the path that they have taken, to carry out in timely fashion the

necessary initiatives for financing and coordinating the reconstruction work. With my greetings for the new year I express my best wishes that your lives will return to normal as soon as possible: the houses, churches and public buildings, rebuilt to anti-earthquake standards, will be a sign of the return to normality, and above all of a spiritual identity that endures and looks to the future.

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to continue vying with one another in generous brotherhood and, as I invoke the constant protection of the Virgin Mary, I impart my Blessing to everyone with great affection.

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