



The Holy See

***LETTERA DI SUA SANTITÀ PIO XII
AL PRESIDENTE DEGLI STATI UNITI,
FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT,
IN SEGUITO AL BOMBARDAMENTO SU ROMA****

20 luglio 1943

Our Secretary of State acknowledged at once by telegram the receipt of Your Excellency's message of the tenth instant, and' he expressed Our grateful appreciation of the assurances given that «neutral status of the Vatican City as well as of the Papal domains throughout Italy will be respected» during the military operations ahead.

The neutrality of the Holy See strikes its roots deep in the very nature of Our apostolic ministry, which places Us above any armed conflict between nations. Yet it is this same God-given mission to safeguard and defend the eternal, spiritual interests of all men redeemed by Christ that makes Us the more sensible of human pain and sorrow. The war continues to multiply these sufferings a hundred-fold for so many millions of peaceloving, innocent men and women that Our paternal heart can find no rest except in constant, increasing efforts to dry the tears of aging mothers, of widows and orphaned children, and to hold back by every means at Our disposal the mounting flood that threatens to bury completely beneath its raging waters once fair lands of Europe and Asia.

Moved by this strong, insistent love for humankind We cannot but take this occasion of the message which Your Excellency has kindly addressed to Us to repeat an appeal made by Us more than once in these past few years. It is a prayer that everywhere, as far as humanly possible, the civil populations be spared the horrors of war; that the homes of God's poor be not laid in ashes; that the little ones and youth, a nation's hope, be preserved from all harm – how Our heart bleeds when We hear of helpless children made victims of cruel war –; that churches dedicated to the worship of God and monuments that enshrine the memory and masterpieces of human genius be protected from destruction. We repeat this appeal unwilling to yield to any thought of its

hopelessness, although almost daily We must continue to deplore the evils against which We pray. And now even in Rome, parent of western civilization and for well nigh two thousand years centre of the Catholic world, to which millions, one may risk the assertion, hundred of millions of men throughout the world have recently been turning their anxious gaze. We have had to witness the harrowing scene of death leaping from the skies and stalking pitilessly through unsuspecting homes striking down women and children; and in person We have visited and with sorrow contemplated the gaping ruins of that ancient and priceless Papal basilica of St. Laurence, one of the most treasured and loved sanctuaries of Romans, especially close to the heart of all Supreme Pontiffs, and visited with devotion by pilgrims from all countries of the world.

God knows how much We have suffered from the first days of the war for the lot of all those cities that have been exposed to aerial bombardments, especially for those that have been bombed not for a day, but for weeks and months without respite. But since divine Providence has placed Us head over the Catholic Church and Bishop of this city so rich in sacred shrines and hallowed, immortal memories, We feel it Our duty to voice a particular prayer and hope that all may recognize that a city, whose every district, in some districts every street has its irreplaceable monuments of faith or art and Christian culture, cannot be attacked without inflicting an incomparable loss on the patrimony of Religion and Civilization.

Meanwhile the war proceeds at a quickened pace; and as the peoples of the world are being told to prepare themselves for increasingly destructive battles that will drain the lifeblood of many thousands of the armed forces and, to Our grief be it said, of civilians, Our own soul makes ready for a more grievous ordeal of sorrow and anxiety. But it is with no diminished hope and confidence that in this very hour We call on God, Our sole stay and comfort, to hasten the dawn of that day when His peace will erect the glorious temple builded of living stones, the nations of the earth, wherein all members of the vast human family will find tranquillity, security in justice, and freedom and inspiration to worship their Creator and to love their fellow-men. It is the day, as Your Excellency says, longed for by all men of good will. But not all realize that that temple will stand and endure only if set on the foundation of Christian, more than mere human charity, not alloyed with vindictive passion or any elements of hate. Such charity the divine Redeemer of mankind proclaimed as His commandment illustrated by His example and sealed with His blood. Through it men can once again be united as loved and loving children of their divine Father in heaven.

We avail Ourselves of this occasion to renew Our good wishes, while We pray God to protect Your Person and the people of the United States.

**Actes et Documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale, vol. 7 p.502-504.*

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana