



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO CASSANO ALL'JONIO

VISIT WITH THE DETAINEES, THE PENITENTIARY STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Square in front of the Penitentiary in Castrovillari (Cosenza)

Saturday, 21 June 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The first act of my pastoral visit is to meet with you in the District Penitentiary of Castrovillari. In this way, I would like to express the closeness of the Pope and the Church to every man and woman around the world who is in prison. Jesus said: "I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:36).

In advice pertaining to prisoners, the theme often highlighted is respect for basic human rights and the need for the punishment to fit the crime. This is certainly an essential aspect of prison policy and it deserves great attention. However this perspective is not enough if it is not accompanied and completed by the Institutions' concrete commitment to bring about an *effective reintegration into society* (cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the 17th Council of Europe Conference of Directors of Prison Administration*, 22 November 2012). When this objective is neglected, the implementation of the penalty degenerates into an instrument of punishment alone and of social retaliation, which in turn is detrimental to the individual and society. And God does not do this with us. God, when He forgives us, He accompanies us and helps us along the way. Always. Even in the small things. When we go to confession, the Lord tells us: "I forgive you. But now come with me". And He helps us to get back on the path. He never condemns. He never simply forgives, but He forgives and accompanies. Then we are fragile and we have to return to confession, everyone. But He never tires. He always takes us by the hand again. This is the love of God, and we must imitate it! Society must imitate it. Take this path.

On the other hand, a true and complete reintegration of the person does not come about as the end of an exclusively human journey. This path also involves *an encounter with God*, the ability to allow ourselves to be looked at by God, who loves us. It is more difficult to allow God to look at us than to look at God. It is more difficult to allow God to encounter us than to encounter God, because we always resist. He waits for us, He looks at us, He always seeks us. This God who loves us, who is capable of understanding us and forgiving our mistakes. The Lord is a master at reintegrating people. He takes us by the hand and brings us back to society and the community. The Lord always forgives, always accompanies and always understands; it is up to us to allow ourselves to be understood, to be forgiven and to be accompanied.

I wish that for each of you this time may not be wasted but that it be a precious time, when you ask and obtain this grace from God. By doing this, you will contribute to bettering, first of all, yourselves but at the same time the community as well, because for better or for worse our actions affect others and the whole human family.

I would like to address a fond thought to your families in this moment. May the Lord grant you the opportunity to embrace them again in serenity and peace.

And lastly I would like to encourage all those who work in this penitentiary — the supervisors, the prison officers and all staff members.

I bless you all from my heart and I entrust you to the protection of Our Lady, our Mother. And I ask you please to pray for me, because I, too, make mistakes and I must do penance. Thank you.