



The Holy See

LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO MARK THE 30th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF DON PINO PUGLISI

*Dear Brother
Archbishop Corrado LOREFICE
of Palermo*

Thirty years have passed since the evening of 15 September 1993, when dear Don Pino Puglisi, a good priest and merciful witness of the Father, tragically concluded his earthly existence precisely in that place where he had decided to be a “worker of peace”, sowing the seed of the Word that saves, that proclaims love and forgiveness in a land that is for many “arid and rocky”, yet even there the Lord let the “good grain and the weeds” grow together (cf. *Mt* 13:24-30). I wish to join with you spiritually in this significant anniversary and thank the God of all consolation for the gift of the Blessed Martyr Don Pino Puglisi, son and pastor of the beloved Church of Palermo and of the whole of Sicily.

On his birthday, the murderous hand of a young man killed him in the street. The streets of the quarter were the field Church he had served with sacrifice and travelled during his pastoral ministry to meet the people, in a land known to him and that he never tired of caring for and watering with the regenerating water of the Gospel, so that each person could quench their thirst and enjoy the refreshment of the soul to face the harshness of a life that was not always merciful. Everyone remembers what he said to the murderer: “I was expecting that”. And so he smiled: that smile, which I mentioned in the homily on the occasion of my visit to Palermo five years ago (*Holy Mass at the Foro Italico*), reaches us like “a gentle light that delves in and enlightens the heart”.

Following Jesus’ example, Don Pino reached the depths of love. He possessed the same features of the meek and humble “good shepherd”: his young people, whom he knew one by one, bear witness to a man of God who favoured the small and the defenceless; he educated them in freedom, in loving life and respecting it. He often cried out with evangelical simplicity the meaning of his tireless commitment in defence of the family, of the many children destined too soon to become adults and condemned to suffering, and the urgency of communicating to them the values of a more dignified existence, thus snatching them from the slavery of evil. This priest did not stop,

he gave himself out of love, embracing the Cross even to the shedding of blood.

To you pastors, to whose hands the Lord has entrusted his people in this island, so rich in history and a crossroads of peoples and cultures, I address my invitation not to stop in the face of the many human and social wounds of the present time, which still bleed and need to be healed with the oil of consolation and the balm of compassion. The preferential option for the poor is urgent; they are faces which question us and guide us in prophecy. As a journeying ecclesial community, all this challenges your synodal discernment in order to initiate a renewed pastoral ministry that corresponds to today's needs in a concrete way.

I therefore urge you to make the beauty and the *difference* of the Gospel emerge, performing deeds and finding the right language to demonstrate the tenderness of God, his justice and his mercy. They are signs that the Christian is called to place in the city of man to enlighten it in the construction of a new humanity. The martyr Don Pino Puglisi possessed wisdom both practical and profound at the same time; indeed, he liked to say: "if each one of us does something, then we can do a great deal". Let this be an invitation for each of us to overcome our many personal fears and resistances and to work together to build a just and fraternal society.

We are well aware of how much Don Pino fought so that no one would feel alone in the face of the challenge of degradation and the covert powers of crime; we also recognize how isolation, closed and complicitly silent individualism are powerful weapons for those who wish to bend others to their own interests. The answer is communion, walking together, as one body, members joined to the Head (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12), to the shepherd and guide of our souls (cf. *1 Pet* 2:25). Live together in Christ, first of all within the priesthood, together with the bishop and among yourselves, and "outdo one another in showing honour" (cf. *Rom* 12:10).

You, who daily bear the responsibilities of the priestly ministry in contact with the realities within this territory, be always and everywhere a true image of the welcoming Good Shepherd, have the courage to dare without fear and instil hope in those you meet, especially the weakest, the sick, the suffering, the migrants, those who have fallen and want to be helped to rise again. Let the young be the focus of your care: they are the hope of the future.

May the disarming smile of Fr. Pino Puglisi spur you on to be joyful and bold disciples, disposed first of all to that constant interior conversion that makes you more ready to serve your brothers and sisters, faithful to your priestly promises and docile in obedience to the Church.

As I entrust everyone to the protection of the Virgin Mary and the Blessed Martyr Pino Puglisi, I send my Blessing, asking you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

Fraternally

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 31 July 2023

Liturgical memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola

FRANCIS

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