



The Holy See

AUDIENCE TO A GROUP OF THE SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY IN ITALY
ON PILGRIMAGE TO ROME ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATIONS OF THE 75th
ANNIVERSARY
OF THE CONSECRATION TO OUR LADY OF THE CHURCH IN SRI LANKA

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica
Saturday, 8 February 2014

I greet you, dear brothers and sisters of the Sri Lankan community in Italy! I extend fraternal greetings to Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith and the other Bishops of your homeland. I thank Cardinal Ranjith for the invitation to visit Sri Lanka. I accept it and believe the Lord will give us this grace. You have come on pilgrimage to Rome to render homage to Our Lady, at the end of the celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of the consecration to her of the Church in Sri Lanka.

Seventy-five years ago, the dark clouds of what would be the second world conflict were thickening in the skies and the faithful, guided by a sure intuition of faith, entrusted themselves to Our Lady, who always defends her children from dangers. In 1940, in the dramatic circumstances of the war, the Archbishop of Colombo, Mgr Jean-Marie Masson, of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, made a vow to build a shrine in honour of Our Lady if the island were preserved from foreign invasion. So it came about, and after the end of the war the beautiful Shrine of Our Lady of Lanka at Tewatte was built, and was consecrated forty years ago.

Dear brothers and sisters, Our Lady is always close to us, she looks upon each one of us with maternal love and accompanies us always on our journey. Do not hesitate to turn to her for every need, especially when the burden of life with all its problems makes itself felt.

Your homeland is called the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, on account of its natural beauty and its shape. They say that the pearl is formed from the tears of the oyster. Unfortunately, many tears

have been shed in recent years, on account of the internal conflict which caused so many victims and so much damage. It is not easy, I know, to heal the wounds and cooperate with yesterday's enemy to build tomorrow together, but it is the only path that gives hope for the future, for development and for peace. For this reason, I assure you that you have a particular place in my prayer. I ask the Lord to grant you the gift of peace and reconciliation, and to help you in your effort to ensure a better future for all who live in Sri Lanka.

I entrust you to the maternal intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Lanka. I ask you to pray for me and from my heart I bless you.