



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO TIRANA (ALBANIA)

MEETING WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE "CENTRO BETHANIA" AND THE REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER CHARITABLE CENTERS OF ALBANIA

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS *Chapel of Bethany (Tirana)*

Sunday, 21 September 2014

Video

Dear Friends,

I thank you from my heart for your joyful welcome! Above all, I wish to thank those of you who, each day, offer to so many children and youngsters in need of care, tenderness, a serene environment and friendliness. May you be also true educators, giving good example in the way you live and the way you offer support.

In places such as this we are all confirmed in the faith; each one is helped in his or her belief, because we see the faith visibly expressed in practical acts of charity. We see how faith brings light and hope in situations of grave hardship; we observe how faith is rekindled in hearts touched by the Spirit of Jesus who said, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (*Mk 9:37*). This faith, working through charity, dislodges the mountains of indifference, of disbelief and of apathy, and opens hands and hearts to work for what is good and share this experience. Through humble gestures and simple acts of service to the least among us, the Good News that Jesus is risen and lives among us is proclaimed.

This Centre, furthermore, shows that it is possible to live together peacefully and fraternally as people of different ethnicities and followers of various religious confessions. Here differences do not prevent harmony, joy and peace, but rather become occasions for a greater mutual awareness and understanding. The variety of religious experiences reveals a true and reverential love of

neighbour; each religious community expresses itself through love and not violence, and is never ashamed of showing goodness! The persons who nourish goodness in their heart, find that such goodness leads to a peaceful conscience and to profound joy even in the midst of difficulties and misunderstandings. Even when affronted, goodness is never weak but rather, shows its strength by refusing to take revenge.

Goodness is its own reward and draws us closer to God, who is the Supreme Good. It helps us to think like him, to see our lives in the light of his plan of love for each one of us, and enables us to delight in life's daily joys, helping us in difficulties and in trials. Goodness offers infinitely more than money, which only deludes, because we have been created to receive the love of God and to offer it, not measuring everything in terms of money or power, which is the danger that kills us all.

Dear friends, in her greeting, your Director recalled the steps taken by your Association and the works that were inspired by the founder, Mrs Antonietta Vitale, whom I cordially greet and thank for her welcome. Your Director also spoke of help given by benefactors and described the progress of various projects. She noted too, how many children have been lovingly welcomed and cared for. Mirjan spoke, on the other hand, of a personal experience, of wonder and gratitude for an encounter which was life-changing for him, and which opened new horizons, offering opportunities to make new friends, and particularly one Friend who is greater than all the others, namely, Jesus. Mirjan said something very poignant in regard to those volunteers who offer their help; he said, "For fifteen years now they have sacrificed themselves joyfully out of love for Jesus and for us". This phrase reveals how making a gift of oneself for the love of Jesus gives birth to joy and hope, and it also shows how serving one's brothers and sisters is transformed into an experience of sharing God's kingdom. The words of Mirjan-Paolo might seem paradoxical to many in our world who are slow to grasp their meaning and who frantically seek the key to existence in earthly riches, possessions and amusements. What these people discover, instead, is estrangement and bewilderment.

The secret to a good life is found in loving and giving oneself for love's sake. From here comes the strength to "sacrifice oneself joyfully", and thus the most demanding work is transformed into a source of a greater joy. In this way, there is no longer any fear of making important choices in life, but they are seen for what they are, namely, as the way to personal fulfilment in freedom.

May the Lord Jesus and his Mother, the Virgin Mary, bless your Association, this *Bethany Centre* and the other centres which love has initiated and providence has built. May God bless all the volunteers, benefactors and the children and adolescents who have been welcomed here. May your patron, Saint Anthony, accompany you along the way. I encourage you to continue faithfully serving the Lord Jesus in the poor and abandoned, and to pray to him so that the hearts and minds of all may be opened to goodness, to charity shown in works, which is the source of real and authentic joy. I ask you also kindly to pray for me, and from my heart, I bless each one of you.

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