



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILGRIMAGE FROM THE DIOCESE OF CASSANO ALL'JONIO**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 21 February 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

First of all, I greet all of you, the faithful of the Diocese of Cassano all'Jonio, accompanied by your Pastor, Bishop Nunzio Galantino, who I thank for the words he addressed to me. I thank you for making him available to attend the Episcopal Conference last year. Many thanks! Many thanks from my heart. Poor man, all year he came and went and came and went.... I think it is time to think about giving you another Pastor.... [the pilgrims respond: "No!"] ... Perhaps you will erect a large statue to remember him.... I also greet the other bishops present, including the Eparch of Lungro. Indeed, the Church in Calabria is made up of diverse traditions and rites which express the variety of gifts which enrich the Church of Christ.

I greet the representatives of the *Emmanuel Community*, born from the desire to "sustain life with life" with those who knock at its door. I thank you [Fr Mario Marafioti] for the words which you addressed to me, and I encourage you in your commitment to welcome the "suffering Christ". This welcome is the fruit of an apostolate style founded on fervent prayer and on an intense community life. This gave rise to the reception centres and places of listening, family homes in Italy and abroad, as well as associations among which I greet the Emmanuel volunteers of Cerignola.

I still have a vivid memory of my visit to your diocesan community: the meetings with the prisoners, the sick, with priests, religious, seminarians.... how many seminarians are there now? ["Eight"] Eight? That's not good enough! We must pray for more vocations. Ok? Ok, good. The Lord told us to pray so that He would send priests. I trust in your prayer: knock at the heart of Jesus so that he may send priests. I remember my meeting with the elderly; my visit to the Cathedral and the Seminary; and then the extraordinary number of people in the Plain of Sibari, all of Calabria was

there! I really experienced your faith and love. May the Lord help you to walk together always, in parishes and associations, led by the Bishop and priests. May He help you to be welcoming communities, to lead to Christ those who are struggling to discern His saving presence.

I would like to confirm a thought that I suggested during my visit: those who love Jesus, who hear and receive the Word and live a sincere response to the call of the Lord cannot in any way give themselves over to works of evil. Jesus or evil! Jesus never invited demons to lunch, no he chased them away, because they were evil. Jesus or evil! One cannot call oneself Christian and violate human dignity; those who belong to the Christian community cannot program or carry out acts of violence against others and against the environment. A person's outward gestures of religiosity that are not accompanied by a real and public conversion are not enough to be considered in communion with Christ and His Church. Outward gestures of religiosity that are not accompanied by a person's real and public conversion cannot be considered to be in communion with Christ and His Church. Outward gestures of religiosity are not enough to accept as believers those who, with the malice and arrogance typical of criminals, make lawlessness their lifestyle. To those who have chosen the path of evil and are affiliated to criminal organizations, I renew the pressing invitation to convert. Open your heart to the Lord! Open your heart to the Lord! The Lord is waiting for you and the Church welcomes you if your willingness to serve the good is as clear and public as was your choice to serve evil.

Dear brothers and sisters of Cassano, the beauty of your land is a gift from God and a heritage to preserve and pass on in all its splendour to future generations. Therefore, everyone must courageously commit themselves to ensuring it is not scarred beyond repair by narrow interests, starting with the competent institutions. The Emmanuel Community is among the "beauties" of your territory. It is an example of acceptance and sharing with the weakest. Young people ruined by drugs have found in you and in your structures the Good Samaritan who knew how to bend over their wounds and was able to anoint them with the balm of closeness and affection. How many families have found in you the help they needed to restore hope in the future of their children! The Church is grateful to you for this service. By being present alongside young people and adults subject to drug addiction, you have embraced the suffering Jesus and you sow hope.

Our era is in great need of hope! Young people should not be denied hope, young people need to hope; we must offer those experiencing pain and suffering concrete signs of hope. Social bodies and associations, as well as individuals who work in hospitality and sharing, are generators of hope. Therefore I urge your Christian communities to be protagonists of solidarity, not to be put off by those who, out of a narrow self-interest, sow selfishness, violence and injustice. Oppose the culture of death and be witnesses to the Gospel of Life! The light of the Word of God and the support of the Holy Spirit will help you to look with new and welcoming eyes at the many new forms of poverty which cause many young people and families to yield to despair.

Upon all of you present here and the entire Diocese of Cassano all'Jonio I invoke the protection of

Mary, Most Holy whom you venerate under the titles of Our Lady of the Chain and Our Lady of the Castle. My blessing goes with you and, please, do not forget to pray for me.

And now let's all turn to Our Lady together praying: *Hail Mary*....

Thank you for your visit. I bless you all!