SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with the archdiocese of Benevento

At 9.10 this morning, before the General Audience in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in the Vatican Basilica the participants in the pilgrimage of the archdiocese of Benevento, led by Archbishop Felice Accrocca, returning the Pope's pastoral visit to Pietrelcina last 17 March on the occasion of the centenary of the apparition of the permanent stigmata of Saint Pio and the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

At the end of the meeting, the pilgrims followed the general audience in the Paul VI Hall from the Vatican Basilica via live connection.

The following are the words of greeting the Pope addressed to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Good morning! So many of you have come, it seems like a canonization! Many thanks to the bishop, to the mayors, to all, thank you for this courtesy which certainly indicates a kindness of the soul, thank you.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am pleased to welcome you and to address my warm welcome to you. You have come to Rome, with your pastor Msgr. Felice Accrocca, to return the visit I had the joy of making to Pietrelcina on 17 March last year, on the occasion of the centenary of the apparition of the permanent stigmata of Saint Pio and on the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

I wish to renew to you all my sincere thanks for the warm welcome you reserved for me on that occasion. I will never forget that day, just as I will never forget the many sick people I greeted; that visit has stayed in my heart. May the memory of that event, full of ecclesial and spiritual significance, revive in each one of you the will to deepen the life of faith, following the teachings of your illustrious and holy countryman Padre Pio. He was distinguished for his steadfast faith in God, firm hope in the heavenly realities, generous dedication to the people, and fidelity to the Church, whom he always loved with all her problems and her adversities. I will pause a little on this. He loved the Church, with the many problems the Church has, with so many adversities, with so

many sinners. Because the Church is holy, she is the Bride of Christ, but we, the children of the Church, are all sinners – some big ones! – but he loved the Church as she was, he did not destroy her with the tongue, as it is the fashion to do now. No! He loved her. He who loves the Church knows how to forgive, because he knows that he himself is a sinner and is in need of God's forgiveness. He knows how to arrange things, because the Lord wants to arrange things well but always with forgiveness: one cannot live an entire life accusing, accusing, accusing the Church. Whose is the office of the accuser! The devil! And those who spend their life accusing, accusing, accusing, are – I will not say children, because the devil does not have any – but friends, cousins, relatives of the devil. And no, this is not good, flaws must be indicated so they can be corrected, but at the moment that flaws are noted, flaws are denounced, one loves the Church. Without love, that is of the devil. Saint Padre Pio had both of these things; he loved the Church with all her problems and her adversities, with the sins of her children. Do not forget this.

I encourage you to under stand and always welcome God's love, the wellspring and reason for our true joy. We are called to give this love that changes life, especially to the weakest and neediest. Each one of us, spreading divine charity, contributes to building a more just and fraternal world. Following the example of Padre Pio, please, never tire of entrusting yourselves to Christ and of announcing His goodness and his mercy with the witness of your life. It is this that the men and women of our time too expect from the Lord's disciples. Witness. Think of Saint Francis – whom your bishop knows well – what did he say to his followers? "Go, bear witness, words are not necessary". At times one must speak, but start out with witness, live as Christians, bearing witness that love is more beautiful than hatred, that friendship is more beautiful than enmity, that the brotherhood between us is more beautiful than war.

Thank you again for this visit! I heartily impart to all of you my Blessing, which I extend to your families, your communities and the entire archdiocese of Benevento. Many thanks!

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