



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO RIO DE JANEIRO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XXVIII WORLD YOUTH DAY

VISIT TO ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD HOSPITAL - V.O.T.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Rio de Janeiro
Wednesday, 24 July 2013

*Dear Archbishop Tempesta, brother Bishops,
Distinguished Authorities,
Members of the Venerable Third Order of Saint Francis of Penance,
Doctors, Nurses, and Health Care Workers,
Dear Young People and Family Members, good night!*

God has willed that my journey, after the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, should take me to a particular shrine of human suffering – the Saint Francis of Assisi Hospital. The conversion of your patron saint is well known: the young Francis abandoned riches and comfort in order to become a poor man among the poor. He understood that true joy and riches do not come from the idols of this world – material things and the possession of them – but are to be found only in following Christ and serving others. Less well known, perhaps, is the moment when this understanding took concrete form in his own life. It was when Francis embraced a leper. This suffering brother was the “mediator of light ... for Saint Francis of Assisi” (*Lumen Fidei*, 57), because in every suffering brother and sister that we embrace, we embrace the suffering Body of Christ. Today, in this place where people struggle with drug addiction, I wish to embrace each and every one of you, who are the flesh of Christ, and to ask God to renew your journey, and also mine, with purpose and steadfast hope.

To embrace, to embrace – we all have to learn to embrace the one in need, as Saint Francis did.

There are so many situations in Brazil, and throughout the world, that require attention, care and love, like the fight against chemical dependency. Often, instead, it is selfishness that prevails in our society. How many “dealers of death” there are that follow the logic of power and money at any cost! The scourge of drug-trafficking, that favours violence and sows the seeds of suffering and death, requires of society as a whole an act of courage. A reduction in the spread and influence of drug addiction will not be achieved by a liberalization of drug use, as is currently being proposed in various parts of Latin America. Rather, it is necessary to confront the problems underlying the use of these drugs, by promoting greater justice, educating young people in the values that build up life in society, accompanying those in difficulty and giving them hope for the future. We all need to look upon one another with the loving eyes of Christ, and to learn to embrace those in need, in order to show our closeness, affection and love.

To embrace someone is not enough, however. We must hold the hand of the one in need, of the one who has fallen into the darkness of dependency perhaps without even knowing how, and we must say to him or her: You can get up, you can stand up. It is difficult, but it is possible if you want to. Dear friends, I wish to say to each of you, but especially to all those others who have not had the courage to embark on our journey: You have to want to stand up; this is the indispensable condition! You will find an outstretched hand ready to help you, but no one is able to stand up in your place. But you are never alone! The Church and so many people are close to you. Look ahead with confidence. Yours is a long and difficult journey, but look ahead, there is “a sure future, set against a different horizon with regard to the illusory enticements of the idols of this world, yet granting new momentum and strength to our daily lives” (*Lumen Fidei*, 57). To all of you, I repeat: Do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! And not only that, but I say to us all: let us not rob others of hope, let us become bearers of hope!

In the Gospel, we read the parable of the Good Samaritan, that speaks of a man assaulted by robbers and left half dead at the side of the road. People pass by him and look at him. But they do not stop, they just continue on their journey, indifferent to him: it is none of their business! How often we say: it’s not my problem! How often we turn the other way and pretend not to see! Only a Samaritan, a stranger, sees him, stops, lifts him up, takes him by the hand, and cares for him (cf. *Lk 10:29-35*). Dear friends, I believe that here, in this hospital, the parable of the Good Samaritan is made tangible. Here there is no indifference, but concern. There is no apathy, but love. The Saint Francis Association and the Network for the Treatment of Drug Addiction show how to reach out to those in difficulty because in them we see the face of Christ, because in these persons, the flesh of Christ suffers. Thanks are due to all the medical professionals and their associates who work here. Your service is precious; undertake it always with love. It is a service given to Christ present in our brothers and sisters. As Jesus says to us: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*).

And I wish to repeat to all of you who struggle against drug addiction, and to those family members who share in your difficulties: the Church is not distant from your troubles, but

accompanies you with affection. The Lord is near you and he takes you by the hand. Look to him in your most difficult moments and he will give you consolation and hope. And trust in the maternal love of his Mother Mary. This morning, in the Shrine of Aparecida, I entrusted each of you to her heart. Where there is a cross to carry, she, our Mother, is always there with us. I leave you in her hands, while with great affection I bless all of you. Thank you.