



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF OF THE OFFICE RESPONSIBLE
FOR PUBLIC SECURITY AT THE VATICAN**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Monday, 28 September 2020*

[Multimedia]

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to meet with the great family of the Inspectorate of Vatican Public Security, which commemorates the 75th anniversary of its founding. I greet you all with affection: directors, officials and agents, with your family members. I address a respectful thought to the Minister of the Interior, whom I thank for his words, and to the Chief of Police. And I would also like to thank you because it was beautiful to enter the hall with a sense of nostalgia for autumn in Buenos Aires [referring to a piece of music played by the Police Band]. Thank you!

In commemorating the founding of this Inspectorate, it comes naturally to thank the Lord for 75 years of history and for the work of so many men and women of the Italian State Police. In the wake of the deep bond that exists between the Holy See and Italy, they have carried out, with competence and passion, a mission that originates from the Lateran Pacts of 1929. Indeed, those agreements, in sanctioning the birth of the Vatican City State, provided for a peculiar regime for Saint Peter's Square, with free access for pilgrims and tourists and under the supervision of the Italian authorities.

Looking back, one can see how the origin of the Inspectorate of Vatican Public Security is located in a context of precariousness and national emergency, when political and social forces were engaged in democratic recovery. In March 1945, the plan to give autonomy and legal form to this police service took shape. The Ministry of the Interior, led by the Prime Minister himself, Ivanoe Bonomi, established the "San Pietro" Special Office of Public Security.

In this way, the service carried out for some time by the police force in Saint Peter's Square and in the areas surrounding the Vatican was strengthened and made more effective. The occupation of Rome by German troops in 1943 had created many difficulties and concerns: it posed the problem of respect on the part of German soldiers for the neutrality and sovereignty of Vatican City, as well as for the Pope. For nine months, the border between the Italian State and Vatican City, drawn along the pavement of Saint Peter's Square, was a place of tensions and fears. The faithful could not easily reach the Basilica in order to pray, and so many gave up trying.

Finally, on 4 June 1944 Rome was liberated, but the war left deep wounds in consciences, rubble in the streets, poverty and suffering in families. The fruit of war is this. Romans, and those pilgrims who could reach the capital, flocked to Saint Peter's, also to express gratitude to Pope Pius XII, proclaimed "*defensor Civitatis*". The new Office of the State Police at the Vatican was thus able to respond adequately to new needs and to render an important service to both Italy and the Holy See.

From the day of the establishment of that Office, which progressively took on other names before the present one, a path has unfolded typified by fruitful collaboration between Italy and the Holy See, and between the Inspectorate and the Vatican bodies responsible for public order and security of the Pope. Although national and international scenarios and security requirements have changed, the spirit in which the men and women of the Inspectorate have implemented their appreciated work has not changed.

Dear officials and agents, I thank you very much for your precious service, characterised by diligence, professionalism and a spirit of sacrifice. Above all, I admire the patience you exercise in dealing with people from different backgrounds and cultures and - I dare say - in dealing with priests! My gratitude also extends to your commitment to accompanying me when travelling within Rome and when visiting dioceses or communities in Italy. It is a difficult job, which requires discretion and balance, to ensure that the Pope's itineraries do not lose their specific character of encounter with the People of God. For all this, once again I am grateful to you.

May the Inspectorate of Vatican Public Security continue to operate in accordance with its luminous history, knowing how to make it bear new and abundant fruits. I am sure that working in this place is a constant reminder to you of the highest values: those human and spiritual values which demand to be welcomed and testified to every day. I hope that your hard work, often carried out with sacrifice and risk, may be inspired by a living Christian faith: it is the most precious spiritual treasure which your families have entrusted to you and which you are called to pass on to your children.

May the Lord reward you as only He knows how to do. May your patron Saint Michael the Archangel protect you and may the Blessed Virgin watch over you and your families. And may my blessing also accompany you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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