



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE ITALIAN REGION OF ABRUZZO  
AFFECTED BY THE EARTHQUAKE

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI***  
***AND PRAYER FOR THE DEAD***

*Tent city of Onna*  
*Tuesday, 28 April 2009*

*Dear Friends,*

I have come in person to your splendid, damaged region, that is living through days of great sorrow and precariousness, in order to express my heartfelt sympathy to you in the most direct way possible. I have been beside you from the first moment ever since I learned the news of the violent earthquake which, in the night of 6 April last, took a toll of almost 300 victims, injuring many and causing extensive material damage to your homes. I followed the news with apprehension, sharing your dismay and your tears for the dead, together with your anxiety over all that you lost in an instant. I am now here among you: I would like to embrace you one by one with affection. The whole Church is with me, close to your suffering, sharing in your grief at the loss of your relatives and friends, anxious to help you rebuild the houses, churches and firms that have collapsed or have been seriously damaged by the earthquake. I admired the courage, dignity and faith with which you have also faced this harsh trial, expressing great determination not to give in to adversity. It was not in fact the first earthquake to have hit your region, and today, as in the past, you have not given up. You have not lost heart. There is in you a strength of mind that inspires hope. Very significant in this regard is a saying dear to your elders: "There are still many days behind the Gran Sasso".

In coming here to Onna, one of the centres that has paid a high price in terms of human lives, I could imagine all the sadness and hardship you have felt during these weeks. If it had been possible, I should have liked to have gone to every village and to every district, to all the tent cities

and to have met everyone. I am well aware that despite the commitment of solidarity shown on all sides, there is much daily hardship involved in living out of one's home, in cars or tents, especially because of the cold and the rain. Then I am thinking of all the young people suddenly forced to come to terms with a harsh reality of the children who have had to interrupt their studies together with their relations and with the elderly, deprived of their habits.

One might say, dear friends, that in a certain way you are in the state of mind of the two disciples of Emmaus, of whom the Evangelist Luke speaks. After the tragic event of the Crucifixion they were going home disappointed and embittered because of the "end" of Jesus. It seemed as though there was no more hope, that God had hidden and was no longer present in the world. But on the way he approached them and began to converse with them. Although they did not recognize him with their eyes, something stirred in their hearts: the words of that "Stranger" rekindled in them the enthusiasm and trust that the experience of Calvary had extinguished. So now dear friends: my humble presence among you is intended as a tangible sign of the fact that the Crucified Lord is alive, that he is with us, that he is really Risen and does not forget us, does not abandon you. He does not leave your questions about the future unanswered, nor is he deaf to the anxious cry of so many families who have lost everything: homes, savings, work, and even also human lives. Of course, his practical response passes through our solidarity, which cannot be limited to the initial emergency but must become a permanent, concrete project in time.

I encourage everyone, including institutions and businesses, so that this city and these regions may recover. The Pope is also here with you today to say a word of comfort about your dead: they are alive in God and expect of you a witness of courage and hope. They are waiting to see reborn this land which must be adorned anew with beautiful, solid houses and churches. It is precisely on behalf of these brothers and sisters that you must commit yourselves once again to living, with recourse to what never dies and what the earthquake has not destroyed, and cannot destroy: love. Love also endures on the other side of the passage of our precarious earthly existence because true Love is God. Those who love, in God, triumph over death and know that they do not lose those they have loved.

I would like to conclude these words by addressing a special prayer to the Lord for the earthquake victims.

*We entrust these our loved ones to you, O Lord, knowing  
that you do not take the life of your faithful but transform it  
and, at the very moment, in which  
the dwelling of our exile on this earth is destroyed,  
you are concerned with preparing for it an eternal and immortal dwelling place in Paradise.  
Holy Father, Lord of Heaven and earth,  
hear the cry of pain and of hope  
that is raised by this community harshly tried by the earthquake!*

*It is the silent cry of the blood of mothers, fathers, young people,  
and also of tiny innocents which rises from this land.  
They have been torn from the love of their dear ones,  
may you welcome them all in your peace, Lord, who are God-with-us,  
Love who can give us life without end.  
We are in need of you and your power,  
for in the face of death we feel small and frail;  
We pray you, help us, because your support alone  
can raise us and lead us to set out together anew on the path of life,  
holding one another trustingly by the hand.  
We ask this of you through Jesus Christ, Our Saviour,  
in whom shines out the hope of blessed resurrection. Amen!*

Now, let us say the prayer the Lord taught us. "Our Father...".

My prayer is with you. We are together and the Lord will help us. thank you for your courage, your faith and your hope.

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