



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AREZZO, LA VERNA AND SANSEPOLCRO

(MAY 13, 2012)

MEETING WITH THE CITIZENS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Torre di Berta Square, Sansepolcro

Sunday, 13 May 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to be here in Sansepolcro and to give thanks to God with you for the millenary foundation of the City, for the miracles of grace and all the benefits that, over 10 centuries, Providence has bestowed. In this historic square, let us repeat the words of the today's Responsorial Psalm: "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things!... Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" (Ps 98[97]).

Dear friends of Sansepolcro, I greet you all warmly. I am grateful for your warm welcome. Despite the slightly bad weather, our hearts are full of light, warmth and joy. I greet you all with affection, starting with Archbishop Riccardo Fontana and with him I greet the priests, the consecrated people and lay faithful who are actively involved in the apostolate. My respectful thoughts go to the civil and military authorities, in particular to the Mayor, Dr Daniela Frullani, whom I thank for her kind words and for the lovely gifts. Thank you!

A thousand years ago, on their journey to the Holy Land, the pilgrim Saints Aegidius and Arcanus, in the face of the major changes taking place, began to search for the truth and the meaning of life. On their return, they brought with them not only the stones gathered on Mount Zion but the

unique idea they had thought of in the Land of Jesus: building on the Upper Tiber Valley an image of Jerusalem, a *civitas hominis* which in its very name, recalls justice and peace. A plan that evokes St Augustine's great view of history in the work "*De civitate Dei*" [The City of God]. When Alaric and his Visigoths entered Rome and the pagan world accused the God of the Christians of not having saved Rome *caput mundi*, the holy Bishop of Hippo made clear what we should expect of God: the proper relationship between the political and religious spheres. He sees in history the presence of two loves: "love of self" which leads to contempt for God and for others, and "love of God" which leads to full freedom for others and to build a city of man governed by justice and peace (cf. *De civitate Dei*, XIV, 28).

Certainly the founders of Sansepolcro were familiar with this vision. They planned a well-structured model for the city, one full of hope for the future, where the disciples of Christ were called to be the engine of society in promoting peace by practising justice. Their courageous challenge became a reality, by persevering on the journey, first with the help of the Benedictine charism then with that of the Camaldolese monks, which continued for generations.

A firm commitment was necessary to found a monastic community and then, around the Abbey church, your City. The project not only influenced the urban plan of the Borgo of Sansepolcro, since the very location of the Cathedral has a strong symbolic value: it is the reference point from which everyone can direct their journey, and especially their lives. It is a powerful call to look on high, to rise above daily routine, to direct our eyes to Heaven in the continual pursuit of spiritual values and of communion with God, which does not alienate us from everyday life, but guides us to live it even more intensely. This prospective is valid even today in order to recover the desire to search for the "truth", to see life as a journey to come closer to the "truth" and the "just".

Dear friends, your founders' ideal has come down to us today and not only constitutes the cornerstone of the identity of Sansepolcro and of the diocesan church, but also presents a challenge to preserve and promote the Christian thought, at the origin of the City. The Millenium is an occasion to reflect that it is, at the same time, an inner journey on the paths of faith and commitment to rediscover the Christian roots, so that the Gospel values may continue to inspire the conscience and your daily history. Today there is the particular need for the service of the Church in the world to be expressed through enlightened faithful lay people, capable of working in the city of man with the will to serve over and above personal interests, beyond partisan views. The common good counts far more than that of the individual and it is up to Christians to contribute to the birth of a new public ethic. The splendid figure of the newly Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo reminds us of this. Christians, especially the youth, are called to counter distrust of the political and social sphere with their commitment and love for responsibility, enlivened by the love of the Gospel which calls us to not to withdraw into ourselves but to take care of others. I invite the youth to think big: may you have the courage to be bold! Be ready to give new flavour to the whole of civil society with the salt of honesty and disinterested altruism. It is necessary to recover a strong motivation to serve the good of citizens.

The challenge before this ancient Borgo is to balance the rediscovery of its thousand-year identity by acceptance and the merging of various cultures and sensibilities. St Paul teaches us that the Church, but also all of society, is like a human body where every part is different from the others but all contribute to the good of the body (cf. 1 Cor 12: 12-26). We thank God that your diocesan community through the centuries developed an ardent missionary openness, as is witnessed by its twinning with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem which I was pleased to learn has borne fruitful collaboration and charitable works to help the neediest brethren in the Holy Land. These ancient bonds led your forefathers to build a replica of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in stone here, in order to give the identity of the people a solid basis and to keep the devotion and prayer for the holy City alive. This bond continues and makes everything concerning the Holy Land appear as a reality that involves you, and likewise Jerusalem. Your name and the presence of the pilgrims of your Diocese nourish the fraternal relationship. In this regard, I am sure that you will be open to new perspectives of solidarity, giving renewed Apostolic momentum to the service of the Gospel. And this will be one of the most significant outcomes of the Jubilee celebrations of your City.

I would like to mention the Cathedral again where I contemplated the beauty of the “Holy Face”. This Basilica is the place for the entire City to give praise to God, a site of newfound harmony between moments of worship and civil life, a reference point for souls to find peace. Just as your forefathers knew how to build the a splendid stone temple, as a sign and appeal to the communion of life, it is up to you to make the meaning of the sacred building visible and credible, living in peace in the ecclesial and civil community. In the middle of the Renaissance, the Biturgensi asked the painter Durante Alberti to depict the humble crib in Bethlehem in the Mother Church, so that no one would forget that God was with them. Mindful of the past and attentive to the present, looking also to the future, you Christians of the Diocese of Arezzo-Cortona-Sansepolcro know that the spiritual progress of your ecclesial communities and the very promotion of the common good of civil communities requires commitment to an ever more vital integration of your parishes and associations in the area. The path taken and the faith that enlivens you give you courage and strength to continue. Looking at your rich spiritual patrimony, you are a living Church at the service of the Gospel! A hospitable and generous Church, that through her witness makes God’s love present for every human being, especially those suffering and needy.

May the Holy Virgin, venerated in a special way in this month of May, watch over each one of you and support your efforts for a better future. O, Mary, Queen of Peace, hear our prayer, make us witnesses of your Son as well as indefatigable workers for justice and peace. Amen! Thank you!