



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO MEXICO

(12-18 FEBRUARY 2016)

**VISIT TO THE PENITENTIARY (CERESO N. 3) OF CIUDAD JUÁREZ**

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS***

*Centre for Social Adjustment No. 3, Ciudad Juárez*

*Wednesday, 17 February 2016*

**[Multimedia]**

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**Spontaneous words of His Holiness Pope Francis in the Prison Chapel**

Good morning!

I thank you for your presence here. I thank you for all the good you are doing here. A thousand ways of doing things well which no one sees.

You experience much fragility. For that reason I chose to bring this image [a crucifix] made of very fragile material. Crystal is very fragile; it breaks easily. And Christ on the Cross is the most fragile of humanity; and yet with this fragility he saves us, helps us, makes us go forward, opens the doors of hope to us.

I hope that each one of you might know how to sow the seeds of hope and resurrection, through the blessing of Our Lady, and by contemplating the fragility of Christ, who took on sin for us, and who allowed himself to be put to death in order to save us. *Hail Mary...*

[Blessing]

And don't forget to pray for me.

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am coming to the end of my visit to Mexico. I could not leave without greeting you and celebrating with you the Jubilee of Mercy.

I am deeply grateful for your words of welcome, which express your many hopes and aspirations, as well as your many sorrows, fears and uncertainties.

During my visit to Africa, I was able to open the door of mercy for the whole world in the city of Bangui — for *this* jubilee, just as it was God our Father who opened the first door of mercy by means of his son, Jesus. United to you and with you today, I want to reiterate once more the confidence that Jesus urges us to have: the mercy that embraces everyone and is found in every corner of the world. There is no place beyond the reach of his mercy, no space or person it cannot touch.

Celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy with you is recalling the pressing journey that we must undertake in order to break the cycle of violence and crime. We have already lost many decades thinking and believing that everything would be resolved by isolating, separating, incarcerating, and ridding ourselves of problems, believing that those policies really do solve problems. We have forgotten to focus on what should truly be our concern: people's lives; their lives, those of their families, and those who have suffered because of this cycle of violence.

Divine Mercy reminds us that prisons are an indication of the kind of society we live in. In many cases they are a sign of the silence and omissions which have led to a throwaway culture, a symptom of a culture that has stopped supporting life, of a society that has little by little abandoned its children.

Mercy reminds us that reintegration does not begin here within these walls; rather it begins before, it begins "outside", in the streets of the city. Reintegration or rehabilitation begins by creating a system which we could call social health, that is, a society which seeks not to cause sickness, polluting relationships in neighbourhoods, schools, town squares, the streets, homes and in the whole of the social spectrum. A system of social health that endeavours to promote a culture which acts and seeks to prevent those situations and pathways that end in damaging and impairing the social fabric.

At times it may seem that prisons are intended more to prevent people from committing crimes than to promote the process of reintegration that allows us to address the social, psychological and family problems which lead a person to act in a certain way. The problem of security is not

resolved only by incarcerating; rather, it calls us to intervene by confronting the structural and cultural causes of insecurity that impact the entire social framework.

Jesus' concern for the care of the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless and prisoners (cf. Mt 25:34-40) sought to express the core of the Father's mercy. This becomes a moral imperative for the whole of society that wishes to maintain the necessary conditions for a better common life. It is within a society's capacity to include the poor, infirm and imprisoned, that we see its ability to heal their wounds and make them builders of a peaceful coexistence. Social reintegration begins by making sure that all of our children go to school and that their families obtain dignified work by creating public spaces for leisure and recreation, and by fostering civic participation, health services and access to basic services, to name just a few possible measures. This is where every process of reintegration begins.

Celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy with you means learning not to be prisoners of the past, of yesterday. It means learning to open the door to the future, to tomorrow; it means believing that things can change. Celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy with you means inviting you to lift up your heads and to work in order to gain this space of longed-for freedom. Celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy with you means repeating that phrase which we just heard, put so well and with such force: "When they sentenced me, someone said: 'Don't ask why you are here but for what purpose'". And this "for what purpose" must carry us forward, this "for what purpose" must help us jump over the hurdle of this social ploy which believes that safety and order are only achieved by incarcerating people.

We know that we cannot turn back, we know that what is done is done. But I wanted to celebrate the Jubilee of Mercy with you, so that it may be clear that it does not exclude the possibility of writing a new story, a new story and then moving forward: the "for what purpose". You suffer the pain of a failure — if only we would all suffer the discomfort of our concealed and cloaked failures — you feel the remorse of your actions and in many cases, with great limitations, you seek to remake your lives in the midst of solitude. You have known the power of sorrow and sin, and have not forgotten that within your reach is the power of the resurrection, the power of divine mercy which makes all things new. Now, this mercy can reach you in the hardest and most difficult of places, but such occasions can also perhaps bring truly positive results. From inside this prison, you must work hard to change the situations which create the most exclusion. Speak with your loved ones, tell them of your experiences, help them to put an end to this cycle of violence and exclusion. The one who has suffered the greatest pain, and we could say "has experienced hell", can become a prophet in society. Work so that this society which uses people and discards them will not go on claiming victims.

In saying this to you I recall what Jesus said: "Let him who has no sin cast the first stone"; I too would have to go away. In saying this to you, I do not do so like someone wagging his finger from on high; I do so from the experience of my own wounds, mistakes and sins which the Lord willed

to pardon and correct. I do so aware that without his grace and my vigilance I could repeat the same mistakes. Brothers and sisters, I always ask myself on entering a prison: "Why them and not me?" This is a mystery of divine mercy; and that divine mercy we are celebrating today, all of us looking ahead with hope.

I wish also to encourage those who work in this Centre or others like it: the directors, prison guards, and all who undertake any type of work in this Centre. And I am also grateful for the efforts made by the chaplains, consecrated persons, and lay faithful who have dedicated themselves to keeping alive the hope of the Gospel of Mercy in the prison, by the pastors, by all who come here to give you the word of God. Never forget that all of you can be signs of the Father's heart. We need one another, as our sister has just said to us, recalling the Letter to the Hebrews: "Feel yourselves imprisoned for one another".

Before giving you my blessing, I would like us to pray in silence, all of us together; each one knows what he wants to say to the Lord, each one knows what to ask forgiveness for. But I also ask you in this silent prayer: let us open our hearts so that we can forgive society which did not know how to help us and how many times it induced us to errors. From the depths of our hearts, may each one of us ask God to help us believe in his mercy. Let us pray in silence.

And now we open our hearts to receive the blessing of the Lord.

May the Lord bless you and keep you:

the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Amen.

And I ask you, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.