



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO MILAN

***GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER TO RESIDENTS
OF THE FORLANINI QUARTER***

*Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord
Square of the "White Houses", Milan
Saturday, 25 March 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Thank you for such a warm welcome! Thank you, thank you very much! You welcome me at the entrance to Milan, and this is a great gift for me: to enter the city, encountering the faces of families, a community.

Thank you for the two special gifts you have given me. The first is this stole [which the Holy Father was wearing], a typical priestly sign which moves me in a special way because it reminds me that I have come here among you *as a priest*; I have entered Milan *as a priest*. You did not buy this stole already made, but rather it was created here; it was woven by some of you, by hand. This makes it priceless; and it reminds us that a Christian priest is *chosen by the people and at the service of the people*; my priesthood, as that of your parish priest and of the other priests who work here, is the gift of Christ, but it is “woven” by you, by your people, with their faith, their labours, their prayers, their tears.... I see this in the sign of the stole. Priesthood is a gift of Christ, but “woven” by you, and I see this in this sign.

Then you have given me this *image of your Madonna*: as it was before and as it is now after the restoration [showing the painting to the people]. Thank you! I know that the Madonna at the top of the Cathedral welcomes me to Milan; but thanks to your gift, Our Lady already welcomes me here, at the entrance. And this is important, because it reminds me of Mary’s care, as she hastened to meet Elizabeth. It is the care, the solicitude of the Church, which does not remain at the centre,

waiting, but goes to meet everyone, in the peripheries; she also goes to meet non-Christians, also non-believers; and she leads everyone to Jesus, who is God's love made flesh, who gives meaning to our life and saves it from evil. And Our Lady does not go to meet in order to proselytise, no! But to accompany us on the journey of life; and also, the fact that it was the Madonna who awaited me at the gate of Milan reminded me of when as children, as kids, we would return from school and our mother was at the door waiting for us. Our Lady is our mother! She always arrives first; she goes ahead in order to welcome us, to wait for us. Thank you for this! The fact of the restoration is also significant: this Madonna of yours has been restored; like the Church always needs to be "restored", because she is made by us, who are sinners; everyone, we are sinners. Let us allow ourselves to be restored by God, by his mercy. Let us allow our heart to be cleansed, especially in this Season of Lent. Our Lady is without sin; she does not need restoration, but her statue does. And thus, as Mother she teaches us to allow ourselves to be cleansed anew by God's mercy, so as to witness to Jesus' holiness. And speaking as brothers, a good Confession will do us such good, all of us! I also ask that confessors be merciful!

A heartfelt thank-you for these gifts! Above all, thank you for being here, for your welcome and your prayers, which accompany me at the entrance to Milan. May the Lord bless you and Our Lady protect you. And please, do not forget to pray for me.

Now let us pray to Our Lady.

[Hail Mary and blessing].