



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS
IN THE NATIONAL MEETING OF PRISON CHAPLAINS***

*Aula Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 23 October 2013*

Dear Brothers,

I thank you and I would like to take advantage of this meeting with you, who work in the prisons throughout Italy, to send my greetings to all the inmates. Please tell them that I am praying for them, I have them at heart, I am praying to the Lord and to Our Lady that they may be able to get through this difficult period in their lives in a positive way, that they may not become discouraged or close in on themselves. You know how one day things go well, but the next day they feel discouraged, and this fluctuation is difficult. The Lord is close, but tell them with your actions, with your words and with your hearts that the Lord does not remain outside, he does not remain outside their cells, he does not remain outside the prison; rather, he is inside, he is there. You can say this: the Lord is inside with them; he too is a prisoner; even today, he is imprisoned by our egoism, by our systems, by so many injustices, for it is easy to punish the weakest while the big fish swim freely in the sea. No cell is so isolated that it is shut to the Lord, none. He is there, he weeps with them, he works with them, he hopes with them, his paternal and maternal love reaches everywhere. I pray that each one may open his heart to this love. When I would receive a letter from one of the inmates in Buenos Aires I would go to visit him; now when those from Buenos Aires write to me I sometimes phone them for a chat, especially on Sunday. When I finish, I think: why is he there and not I who have so many and different reasons to be there? Thinking about this does me good: seeing that we share the same weaknesses, why did he fall and I did not? This is a mystery that makes me pray and makes me draw close to inmates.

I also pray for you, who are chaplains, and for your ministry which is difficult, it is very demanding and very important since it expresses one of the works of mercy: to make the Lord's presence visible in the prison, in the prison cell. You are a sign of the closeness of Christ to these brothers who are in need of hope. Recently you spoke about a justice of reconciliation, but also about a justice of hope, open doors, and horizons. This is not a utopia, it can be done. It is not easy, for our weaknesses are everywhere, the devil is also everywhere, temptations are everywhere; but we must always try.

It is my sincere wish that the Lord be always with you, that he bless you and that Our Lady watch over you; let yourselves remain always in the hands of Our Lady, for she is the mother of you and of all those in prison. This is my wish for you, thank you! And let us ask the Lord to bless you and all of your friends in the prisons; but let us first pray to Our Lady that she may always lead us to Jesus: *Hail Mary* ...