

PASTORAL VISIT TO PALERMO

MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES OF SICILY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Politeama Square, Palermo
Sunday, 3 October 2010*

(Video)

Dear Young People and Families of Sicily,

I greet you with great affection and great joy! Thank you for your joy and for your faith! This encounter with you is the last meeting of my Visit to Palermo today but in a certain sense it is the central one. In fact, it is this occasion that prompted you to invite me: your Regional Meeting of Young People and Families. So today I must begin here, with this event; and I do so first of all by thanking Bishop Mario Russotto of Caltanissetta, who is the Delegate for the pastoral care of youth and the family at the regional level, and then, also, the two young people, Giorgia and David. Dear friends, yours was more than a greeting, it was a sharing of faith and hope. I warmly thank you. The Bishop of Rome goes everywhere to strengthen Christians in the faith, but he then goes home strengthened by your faith, by your joy and by your hope!

Therefore, young people and families, we must take seriously this gathering, this get-together, which cannot be solely an occasional or functional event. It has a meaning, a human, Christian and ecclesial value. And I do not want to start with a discussion but with a testimonial, a true and very timely life story. I believe you know that last Saturday, 25 September, a young Italian girl, called Chiara, Chiara Badano, was declared Blessed in Rome. I invite you to become acquainted with her. Her life was a short one but it is a wonderful message. Chiara was born in 1971 and died in 1990 from an incurable disease. Nineteen years full of life, love and faith. Her last two years were also full of pain, yet always of love and light, a light that shone around her, that came from within: from her heart filled with God! How was this possible? How could a 17 or 18-year-old girl live her suffering in this way, humanly without hope, spreading love, serenity, peace and faith? This was obviously a grace of God, but this grace was prepared and accompanied by human collaboration as well: the collaboration of Chiara herself, of course, but also of her parents and friends.

In the first place her parents, her family. Today I want to emphasize this in a special way. Bl. Chiara Badano's parents are alive, they were in Rome for the Beatification I myself met them and they are witnesses of the fundamental fact that explains everything: their daughter was overflowing with God's light! And this light, which comes from faith and love, was first lit by them: father and mother kindled that little flame of faith in their daughter's soul and helped Chiara to keep it constantly alight, even in the difficult times of growing up and above all during her great and long trial of suffering, as was the case for Venerable Maria Carmelina Leone, who died at the age of 17. This, dear friends, is the first message that I would like to leave you: the relationship between parents and children as you know is fundamental; but not only due to a just tradition I know that this is keenly felt by Sicilians. It is something more, which Jesus himself taught us: it is the torch of faith that is passed on from one generation to the next; that flame which is also present in the rite of Baptism, when the priest says: "Receive the light of Christ... [a sign of Easter]... this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly".

The family is fundamental because that is where the first awareness of the meaning of life germinates in the human soul. It germinates in the relationship with the mother and with the father, who are not the masters of their children's lives but are God's primary collaborators in the transmission of life and faith. This happened in an exemplary and extraordinary way in Bl. Chiara Badano's family; but it also happens in many families. In Sicily too there are splendid examples of young people who have grown up like beautiful, vigorous plants, after germinating in the family with the Lord's grace and human collaboration. I am referring to Bl. Pina Suriano, Venerable Maria Carmelina Leone and Maria Magno Magro, a great teacher; to the Servants of God Rosario Livatino, Mario Giuseppe Restivo and to many young people whom you know! Often their activities do not make the headlines because evil is more newsworthy, but they are the strength and future of Sicily! The image of a tree is very significant for representing the human person. The Bible uses it, for example, in the Psalms. Psalm 1 says blessed is the man who meditates on the law of the Lord: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, / that yields its fruit in its season" (v. 3). These "streams of water" could be the "river" of tradition, the "river" of the faith from which to draw the vital sap. Dear young people of Sicily, be trees that sink their roots in the "river" of good! Do not be afraid of opposing evil! Together you will be like a forest that grows, silent perhaps, but capable of yielding fruit, of bringing life and of deeply renewing your land! Do not give in to the suggestions of the Mafia, which is a path to death incompatible with the Gospel, as our Bishops have so often said and say!

The Apostle Paul takes up this image in his Letter to the Colossians, where he urges Christians to be "rooted and built up in him [Christ] and established in the faith" (cf. Col 2: 7). You young people know that these words are the theme of my [Message for next year's World Youth Day in Madrid](#). The image of the tree tells us that each one of us needs fertile ground in which to sink our own roots, a ground rich with nutritious substances that make a person grow: these are values, but above all they are love and faith, the knowledge of God's true face, the awareness that he loves us infinitely, faithfully, patiently, to the point of giving his life for us. In this sense the family is a "Church in miniature" because it transmits God, it transmits Christ's love, by virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony. Divine love, which unites a man and a woman and makes them become parents, is capable of generating in the hearts of their children the seed of faith, that is, the light of the deep meaning of life.

And here we come to the next important passage, which I can only outline: the family, to be this "Church in miniature", must be properly inserted in the "great Church", that is, in the family of God that Christ came to form. Bl. Chiara Badano also witnessed to this, as did all the other young Saints and Blesseds; that together with the family they were born into, the great family of the Church is fundamental, encountered and experienced in the parish community and in the diocese. For Bl. Pina Suriano it was Catholic Action widespread in this region for Bl. Chiara Badano, the Focolare Movement. In fact, ecclesial movements and associations do not serve themselves but Christ and the Church.

Dear Friends, I know your difficulties in today's social context. They are the difficulties of the young people and families of today, particularly in the south of Italy. And I also know the commitment with which you seek to react to and face these problems, supported by your priests who are authentic fathers and brothers in the faith to you, as was Fr Pino Puglisi. I thank God for having met you, because wherever there are young people and families who choose the path of the Gospel there is hope. And you are a sign of hope, not only for Sicily but also for all Italy. I have brought you a testimony of holiness and you offer me your own: the faces of the many young people of this land who have loved Christ with Gospel radicalism; your own faces resemble a mosaic! This is the greatest gift we have received: to be Church, to be in Christ a sign and instrument of unity, of peace, of true freedom. No one can take this joy from us! No one can take

this power from us! Courage, dear young people and families of Sicily! Be holy! At the school of Mary, our Mother, make yourselves fully available to God. Let yourselves be moulded by his Word and his Spirit and you will be even more, and increasingly, the salt and light of this beloved land of yours. Thank you!

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