

INTERNATIONAL GYPSY CAMP

HOMILY OF PAUL VI

Pomezia, September 26, 1965

The rain, that for the whole night on Saturday until Sunday, September 26, at approximately 1:00pm has fallen down hard and continuously throughout the whole region of Lazio, makes it impossible to hold the entire program planned for the historical meeting between the Pope and the newly established pilgrimage.

There are nomads, gitanos and gypsies from various backgrounds, countries and origins, all of them joined together by the bond of faith, willing to convey to the Vicar of Jesus Christ a manifestation of heartfelt homage.

Nevertheless... «aquae multae non potuerunt extinguere caritatem». The christian zeal overcomes the fear of the inclement weather, in order to be present at the arrival of the Holy Father; His celebration of the Mass; His heartfelt Exhortation; the details of a dialogue begun with genuine understanding and therefore destined to continue along the years.

Even though the place of the meeting has been moved, nevertheless the enthusiasm of the attendees has surely grown, - many of whom are in their colorful traditional costumes -, the sacred event is held in an atmosphere of profound piety and commotion, with the altar placed close to the facade of the pre-seminary «Angelo Bartolomasi», distant about 200 meters from the camp nearby Pomezia.

The Holy Father arrives at 5:00pm and goes through two dense wings of gypsies and other faithful coming from Rome and from the neighboring cities and towns.

After the Gospel, proclaimed to the crowd in five different languages, there is the homily of the Holy Father.

*Dear Gypsies, dear Nomads, dear Gitanos,
coming from every part of Europe, to you I convey Our greeting.*

1. Our greeting is for you, perpetual pilgrims; to you, voluntary exiles; to you, refugees always on the move; to you, restless itinerants! To you, with no house, with no fixed accommodation, with no friendly homeland, with no public society! To you, lacking of qualified professions, social contacts, and necessary living means!

I greet you, who have chosen your small tribe, your caravan, as your separate and secret world; you that look at the world with mistrust and are seen by all with mistrust; you, that have chosen to be strangers always and everywhere, isolated, foreign, moved out of the social circle; you that from centuries have been on the move, and you do not have yet a specific place to go, or to stay!

2. Well, today you have come here, you have come together. You get together, and you almost form one people; you meet with Us, and you realize this is a great event, almost a discovery.

My dearest nomads, you understand the meaning of this encounter. Here you find a place, a station, a refuge, different from the camps, where you usually dwell with your caravans: wherever you stop over, you are considered importune and stranger; and you remain timid and fearful; here you should not, here you are welcome, awaited, greeted and celebrated. Have you

ever had this luck? Here you have a new experience: here you find someone that cares about you, esteems, appreciates and assists you. Have you ever been greeted, during your endless excursions, like brothers? Like children? Like citizens equal to everyone else? Actually, like members of a society that does not reject you, instead welcomes you, looks after you and keeps you in high esteem? What does this newness mean? Where did you arrive?

You have come, firstly, to a civil world, that does not despise, persecute, and exclude you from their community. You have to acknowledge the fact that the surrounding society has changed a lot from the one that some decades ago chased you out and made you suffer so much. With no hatred for those who were ruthless and cruel towards you, and basely put to death so many brothers and sisters of yours. We kindly remember all the gypsies victims of racial persecutions, we pray for your beloved dead, and let us invoke from God for the living and the dead peace, eternal for these, and the earthly one for all men in this world. Indeed, be good and righteous; and acknowledge the fact that society is better today; and if you wish to remain at its margins, and thus bear with so many difficulties, however it offers to everyone its freedom, laws and services.

3. But what counts now is the different discovery. You discover that you are not outside, but within another society; a society visible but spiritual; human and religious at the same time; this society, you know, is called the Church. Today you, like never before, discover the Church. You are not at the margins of the Church, but, for some reasons, you are at the center, at the heart. You are in the heart of the Church, because you are alone: nobody is alone in the Church; you are in the heart of the Church, because you are poor and in need of care, education, help; the Church loves the poor, the suffering, the little ones, the disadvantage, and the abandoned.

It is here, in the Church, that you realize that you are not only members, colleagues, friends, but brothers; and not only between you and us, that today welcome like brothers, but somehow the christian way, brothers with all men; it is here, in the Church, that you hear being addressed as God's family, that gives her members an unfathomable dignity, and that makes them be men in the highest and fullest sense; and to be wise, virtuous, honest, courageous and good; to sum it up, Christians.

We are pleased to hold the title of Head of the Church, that has been given to us not because of a special merit of Ours, in order to greet you all, dear Nomads, dear Gypsies, dear pilgrims on the streets of the earth, just like our own children; in order to welcome and bless you all.

We wish that the result of this extraordinary meeting were to make you think about the holy Church, to which you belong to; to get to know her better, appreciate her more and love her all the more; and we wish that the result were at the same time to awaken in you the awareness of who you are; each of you must remind himself: I am a christian, I am catholic. And if someone cannot say that, because he does not have that luck, he should know that the catholic Church loves him too, respects him and waits for him! And may he too look at the Church with a sincere eye and good heart.

4. This reawaken awareness towards the Church must be the first effect of this memorable day, but not the only one. There are so many other things that We wish for you and from you. Just like your caravans, after a long and tiring journey, reach a beautiful place, that is green and clear, near a clean and fresh river, and find rest, solace and joy, thus we wish that this gathering were beneficial to you with many spiritual consolations: the peace of your conscience, the promise to remain good and honest, the simple and deep prayer, the mutual forgiveness for each other, if ever your souls were divided and hostile; and so on. We think that your relations with the society

you cross and touch with your caravans should improve: as you like to find rest and kind hospitality, where you set your campsite, so you must make sure you leave in every place a good and friendly remembrance: may your path be filled with examples of goodness, honesty, and respect. Perhaps, by being more qualified as artisans you could perfect also your lifestyle on your behalf and other people's. Moreover, we would like to have a promise from you: to accept the caring and selfless assistance of the good Priests and people, that have brought you here and would like to lead you in the ways of goodness and faith, almost like escorting as fathers and brothers your endless journeys. Trust them! We have nothing to ask from you, except accepting the maternal friendship of the Church. We could do something for you, for your children, your sick people, your families, your souls, if you will trust the Church and her representatives.

5. And to all these very people we would like to assure Our appreciation and express Our encouragement. To all the Bishops holding dearer in their hearts these humble itinerant children of Ours, to Mons. Bernardin Collin, Bishop of Digne, who on behalf of Our Consistorial Congregation oversees the pastoral works of the Nomads, to the good Father Fleury, S.J., promotor of such a beneficial activity, to Fr. Bruno Nicolini, Fr. Mario Ambrogio Riboldi, and to all the Priests and Religious and Lay People working on behalf of the Gypsies, I openly express my praise and gratitude. These worthy people are the ones who show and practice the charity of the Church and Ours on behalf of the Nomads, and because they minister and impart to them Our blessings, they deserve them too heartfelt and special for themselves.

And now, brothers and sisters let us pray together. The divine Pilgrim, to whom it was neither long nor burdensome the infinite way that from heaven brought him to earth to become our companion on the journey of life, is about to become present, here, among us and for us, in the Sacrament of the altar. Let us concentrate and warm up our prayers: Christ is near. Let us invite him with the mysterious invocation of the Bible: «Come, Lord Jesus» (Rev 22:20).

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Paternal expressions for the groups coming from France

Chers tziganes, nomades et gitans de langue française, à vous Notre souhait particulier de bienvenue. Nous tenons à vous dire que vous êtes chez vous dans l'Église catholique, qui vous accueille, non seulement comme des compagnons, des collègues et des amis, mais comme des frères appartenant à la grande famille des enfants de Dieu.

Aussi est-ce comme nos propres fils que Nous vous saluons, que Nous vous accueillons, et que Nous vous bénissons, demandant au Seigneur que tette rencontre vous aide à mieux connaître et à mieux aimer l'Église du Christ Notre Seigneur. Et Nous bénissons d'une manière toute particulière Monseigneur Bernardin Collin, le bon Père Fleury, et tous ceux qui vous montrent le visage maternel et secourable de l'Église. Écoutez-les comme Nos envoyés, comme les ministres du Seigneur. Avec eux et pour vous, Nous le prions à toutes vos intentions.

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Praise for the beloved gitanos from Spain

Un saludo también para vosotros, queridos gitanos venidos de España. Nuestra palabra tiene un acento de gratitud particular por el entrañable afecto con que habéis llegado aquí. Lo estamos leyendo en vuestros semblantes. Sabemos además cómo en medio de la dureza de vuestra peculiar vida surge, como flor en la escarpada, la expresión artística con que os convertís en

mensajeros de alegría, y que cobra no raras veces matiz sagrado. Así nos lo dice el espectáculo, con que después de misa nos vais a representar la parábola de los invitados al banquete. ¡Gracias, gracias!

La asistencia religiosa y social que os presta la Iglesia en España, por medio de múltiples y laudables obras, se encuadra en organizaciones beneméritas, como la *Caritas* y la Comisión Episcopal de Emigración, y se enlaza en la historia con nombres tan gloriosos como los de los sacerdotes Manjón y Poveda. Que el recuerdo de este día sea luz en vuestro camino.

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Cordial greetings to the German speaking gypsies

Euch, liebe Zigeuner, die ihr aus allen Teilen Europas hierher zusammengekommen seid, gilt heute Unser väterlicher Gruss und Willkomm!

Ihr seid immer unterwegs, immer auf Wanderung, ohne bleibende Heimat. Hier in der Kirche aber habt ihr das Recht, euch heimisch zu fühlen, denn ihr seid Christen und seid Katholiken. Erfüllt als solche immer eure Pflichten: tuet das Gute, meidet das Böse! Von Herzen segnen Wir euch darum wie alle eure Lieben und erleben euch wie euren eifrigen Seelsorgern Gottes bleibenden Schutz und seine überreiche Gnade.

(Unofficial translation)