

## POPE FRANCIS' VISIT TO LOPPIANO

*10<sup>th</sup> May 2018*

### INTRODUCTORY WELCOME BY EMMAUS (MARIA VOCE)

Your Holiness, dear Pope Francis

On the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2014, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this little town. On that occasion, through a video message, you sent us an encouragement, "to look ahead always, and to aim high with confidence, courage and creativity." Since then we have sought to be guided by your words and we nurtured the dream that we see fulfilled today, in wonder and joy, after you said "See you again" at the end of your video message. Thank you, Your Holiness, in the name of the whole Focolare Movement, which sees in your visit God's special look of love.

We are at Loppiano, the little town that is the "prototype" for the other 24 little towns found in all continents, in the most varied social and cultural contexts, like the United States of America, Cameroon, the Philippines, Germany, Brazil, Argentina and so on.

Chiara Lubich always wanted to see these little towns established, as workshops of human living, models of a united world, and a witness to how society could be if it were founded on the mutual love of the Gospel. This is what Loppiano would like to show to the world.

Today, here before you, are various groups. Apart from those who live in Loppiano, there are many members from the centre of the Movement, which, as you know, is based at Rocca di Papa. There are a good number of people who represent the Focolare Movement from other regions of Italy. There are many friends of Loppiano, from Valdarno and places much further afield. Among them is our friend Luce Ardente, a Buddhist monk who lived here for some months and who wished to return here today with other monks from Thailand. Of course, there is our Bishop of Fiesole, Bishop Mario Meini, Cardinal Giuseppe Betori, Grand Chancellor of the Sophia University Institute; the Mayor of Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Dr Giulia Mugnai and other civic, religious and military authorities. To all of them go our greeting and our gratitude for having wished to show, through their presence, the affection they have for you and for the little town.

At the moment about 850 people live in Loppiano, who come from 65 countries, and they greet you with all their hearts.

Just as it is, therefore, the little town is a workshop of life, a training ground in which people learn to build unity in diversity. Among those living here is a core group of people who live here permanently, while many others leave after a year or so, taking with them in their minds and hearts the certainty that a united world is possible and who commit to help bring it about in their countries of origin.

The "temporary" inhabitants are:

- Families who live at the "Loreto School" where they learn to root human love into divine love

- Young people who have felt called to consecrate their whole life to God and are preparing to go to the various focolares spread throughout the world.
- Priests, seminarians and men and women religious who come from all over the world to learn and live our charism's communitarian spirituality and prepare themselves to make their own contribution so that the Church may be ever more the "home and school of communion".
- The "Gen", young people who want to discover what it means to make the Gospel the compass of their life, who have decided to show their contemporaries the greater purpose that guides everything when you choose to live for others.
- The men and women "Volunteers" of God, lay people who come here wanting to become "artisans of peace" and "apostles of dialogue", so as to then go back into society and transform it from within.

About 10 years ago, here at Loppiano, the Sophia University Institute was founded, erected by the Holy See. It fulfils one of Chiara Lubich's greatest dreams, that of rooting the search for truth into two essential foundations, dialogue and reciprocity, and to unite thought and life, so as to overcome the fragmented aspect of knowledge and establish the culture of unity on a sound academic basis.

Since 2006, Loppiano has also been the home of the Lionello Bonfanti Industrial Park, which is a reference point for over 200 Italian businesses that are part of the Economy of Communion Project, which you know well. Its objective is to contribute to the achievement at a global level of a more equal society, where there are no more poor.

The Loppiano Prima Cooperative, instead, was founded many years ago, in 1973, to manage the land and the houses already present on this agricultural landholding, which at the time was semi-abandoned. If, today, the little town, with its fields and its biologically cultivated land, with its roads and houses and clean water for all, can sing its "Laudato Si" to the Creator, it is due to the faith and courage of the pioneers, of those first families who left everything to come and build this little town, both spiritually and practically. Some of those pioneers have already ended their earthly life; others are here with us and we greet them with affection and gratitude.

As one can imagine, in the midst of such beautiful surroundings, art also became a citizen of Loppiano: Gen Rosso and Gen Verde, the Ave Art Centre, Ciro's workshop, Hung's studio. All these are artistic expressions of different kinds, from music to architecture, to plastic arts.

About 35,000 visitors come to Loppiano each year. They want to share our life for a few days or just for a few hours. Our hope is that those who come to this little town should find a home, a family, a mother: Mary!

It is Mary who influences and guides every aspect of the life of the whole Movement as it lives in society. We would want her to reign in this place, which not by chance bears the name "Mariapolis", city of Mary. In the Magnificat, Mary herself outlined a programme of life and action, and she urges us every day to open the doors of our hearts and of this town to all those who suffer, to all who seek happiness on the pathways of violence or of wealth.

Holy Father, we have a very high goal, we want to "aim high" as you told us four years ago. We would like to say to everyone, "Come and see. When mutual love is the law of shared living, you experience the joy of the Gospel and feel you are on the front line in writing a new page of history."

Through a few questions by some of those who live here, we would like to tell you more about Loppiano, seen from three aspects: the town of the Pact – the town that enables formation – a model town for a united world. Your words will certainly shed light on our path.