Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Francis raises his hand to wave while standing in front of a large image of a white priest

An image of Blessed Pino Puglisi, slain by the Mafia in 1993, is seen as Pope Francis leads a meeting with young people in Palermo, Sicily, in this file photo from Sept. 15, 2018. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — August 22, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Since the Mafia feeds on poverty and isolation, the response of the Catholic Church must be to build a community where everyone knows they are welcome, loved, cared for and called to conversion, Pope Francis told priests in Sicily.

Anticipating the 30th anniversary of the martyrdom of Blessed Pino Puglisi at the hands of the Mafia, the pope said the priest had spent his life fighting to ensure "that no one would feel alone in the face of the challenge of degradation and the covert powers of crime; we also recognize how isolation, closed and complicitly silent individualism are powerful weapons for those who wish to bend others to their own interests."

"The answer is communion, walking together, as one body, members joined to the head, to the shepherd and guide of our souls," the pope wrote in a letter addressed to Archbishop Corrado Lorefice of Palermo and released by the Vatican Aug. 20.

Blessed Puglisi was shot at point-blank range outside his home Sept. 15, 1993, which was his 56th birthday. One of the hit men convicted of his murder told investigators the priest's last words were, "I've been expecting you."

Advertisement

Francis asked the priests of Sicily to be courageous like Blessed Puglisi and "not to stop in the face of the many human and social wounds of the present time, which still bleed and need to be healed with the oil of consolation and the balm of compassion."

To build a new society in Sicily, he said, the church's ministers must "make the beauty and the difference of the Gospel emerge, performing deeds and finding the right language to demonstrate the tenderness of God, his justice and his mercy."

Blessed Puglisi's refrain that "If each one of us does something, then we can do a great deal," is an invitation, the pope said, to "overcome our many personal fears and resistances and to work together to build a just and fraternal society."

Francis had traveled to Palermo Sept. 15, 2018, to personally mark the 25th anniversary of Blessed Puglisi's martyrdom. His homily and speeches included denunciations of the Mafia and a call for the mafiosi to convert, but he focused especially on encouraging local Catholics to live their faith and to courageously stand up to all forms of injustice, which flow from and feed into the Mafia's power.