

In Sicily, pope asks young to reject Mafia's 'path of death'

PALERMO, Sicily – Pope Benedict XVI urged the young people of Sicily to reject the “path of death” offered by organized crime and to stand up to evil by witnessing the values of the Gospel.

The pope made his comments Oct. 3 during a one-day visit to Palermo, the Sicilian capital, where he celebrated a seaside Mass in the port area, met with priests and religious and spoke to youths and families of the region.

Before returning to Rome, he paused to pray at the site of the assassination of anti-Mafia prosecutor Giovanni Falcone, who was killed by a bomb in 1992.

Addressing the young in a central square of Palermo, the pope encouraged them to reshape Sicilian society.

“Don’t be afraid to fight against evil!” he said. “Don’t give in to the suggestions of the Mafia, which is a path of death, incompatible with the Gospel, as your bishops have so often said!”

Throughout his visit, the pope pointed to the example of Father Giuseppe “Pino” Puglisi, a popular anti-crime pastor in Palermo who was slain in 1993, and urged priests and the faithful to “imitate his heroic example.”

The pope also acknowledged the difficulty in breaking through a culture of crime, especially when many people are out of work and uncertain about their future.

“Today I am here to strongly encourage you not to be afraid to witness with clarity the human and Christian values that are so deeply rooted in the faith and in the history of this region and its people,” he said.

The pope reminded Sicilians that their island has been “a land of saints who belong to every condition of life.” He asked them to renew their own faith and bring it to bear in society with a greater sense of determination.