



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO PERUGIA AND ASSISI

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES GATHERED IN ASSISI FOR THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Basilica of St Mary of the Angels

27 October 1986

My Brothers and Sisters,

Heads and Representatives of the Christian Churches

and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,

Dear Friends,

1. HAVE THE HONOUR and pleasure of welcoming all of you for our World Day of Prayer in this town of Assisi. Let me begin by thanking you from the bottom of my heart, for the openness and good will with which you have accepted my invitation to pray at Assisi.

As religious leaders you have come here not for an interreligious Conference on peace, where the emphasis would be on discussion or research for plans of action on a worldwide scale in favour of a common cause.

The coming together of so many religious leaders to pray is in itself an invitation today to the world to become aware that there exists another dimension of peace and another way of promoting it which is not a result of negotiations, political compromises or economic bargainings. It is the result of prayer, which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone.

We come from afar, not only, for many of us, by reason of geographical distance, but above all because of our respective historical and spiritual origins.

2. The fact that we have come here does not imply any intention of seeking a religious consensus among ourselves or of negotiating our faith convictions. Neither does it mean that religions can be reconciled at the level of a common commitment in an earthly project which would surpass them all. Nor is it a concession to relativism in religious beliefs, because every human being must sincerely follow his or her upright conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth.

Our meeting attests only - and this is its real significance for the people of our time - that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of all people.

3. I see this gathering today as a very significant sign of the commitment of all of you to the cause of peace. It is this commitment that has brought us to Assisi. The fact that we profess different creeds does not detract from the significance of this Day. On the contrary, the Churches, Ecclesial Communities and World Religions are showing that they are eager for the good of humanity.

Peace, where it exists, is always extremely fragile. It is threatened in so many ways and with such unforeseeable consequences that we must endeavour to provide it with secure foundations. Without in any way denying the need for the many human resources which maintain and strengthen peace, we are here because we are sure that, above and beyond all such measures, we need prayer - intense, humble and trusting prayer - if the world is finally to become a place of true and permanent peace.

This Day is, therefore, a day for prayer and for what goes together with prayer: silence, pilgrimage and fasting. By abstaining from food we shall become more conscious of the universal need for penance and inner transformation.

4. Religions are many and varied, and they reflect the desire of men and women down through the ages to enter into a relationship with the Absolute Being.

Prayer entails conversion of heart on our part. It means deepening our sense of the ultimate Reality. This is the very reason for our coming together in this place.

We shall go from here to our separate places of prayer. Each religion will have the time and opportunity to express itself in its own traditional rite. Then from these separate places of prayer, we will walk in silence towards the lower Square of Saint Francis. Once gathered in the Square, again each religion will be able to present its own prayer, one after the other.

Having thus prayed separately, we shall meditate in silence on our own responsibility to work for peace. We shall then declare symbolically our commitment to peace. At the end of the Day, I shall try to express what this unique celebration will have said to my heart, as a believer in Jesus Christ and the first servant of the Catholic Church.

5. I wish to express again my gratitude to you for having come to Assisi to pray. I also thank all the individuals and religious communities who have associated themselves with our prayers.

I have chosen this town of Assisi as the place for our Day of Prayer for Peace because of the particular significance of the holy man venerated here - Saint Francis - known and revered by so many throughout the world as a symbol of peace reconciliation and brotherhood. Inspired by his example, his meekness and humility let us dispose our hearts for prayer in true internal silence.

Let us make this Day an anticipation of a peaceful world.

May peace come down upon us and fill our hearts!

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