



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON
THE THEME: 'PEOPLE OF PRAYER PEOPLE OF PEACE'***

Saturday, 29 October 1988

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you and to meet you personally in order to express my sentiments of friendship and respect. You are bringing to a close your second Meeting, called Man and Religion, on the theme of People of Prayer in search of Peace. In these days spent in Rome you have met in a spirit of fraternal harmony to discuss, in seminars and conferences, the place of peace in the various religions. Above all, as men and women of religion and prayer, you have prayed for peace. The high point of your gathering, in fact, has been the day of prayer in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere and in the adjoining square.

Two years after the World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, at which some of you were present, you have come together to remember that event and to deepen that commitment and that spirit. Addressing the Representatives of the Religions of the World on that occasion, I said: "Let us continue to spread the message of peace. Let us continue to live the spirit of Assisi". I therefore congratulate the Community of Saint Egidio, which has again organized this Meeting in Rome, in that same spirit of hospitality and friendship which distinguishes those who have made service and dialogue the centre of their lives.

The great gift of peace requires that we persevere in the spirit of prayer and hope which we experienced at Assisi. The threat of conflict has not disappeared. There are still people who are suffering the consequences of war and strife. Many still place their trust in the force of arms as a means of resolving disputes among nations. Our prayers and our will for peace seem small when compared to the widespread logic of force. Yet they constitute a splendid reserve of spiritual energies that saves the world from the onslaught of violence, and offer inspiration and encouragement to the builders of peace.

The world needs peacemakers. And it is among those who put prayer and the reference to God at the centre of their lives that they should be found. Your Meeting shows the willingness of believers to be committed to the work of peace. Indeed, men and women of prayer, believers are by their very vocation builders of peace. They feel “the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace”. This year you are presenting this invitation: “Let every religious man and woman, every believer, be always and in every act a witness and seeker of peace”.

In the joy of welcoming all of you, I greet in a particular way my brothers and sisters of the various Christian Churches and communities. For us Christians, for me as Bishop of Rome, the commitment to peace is profoundly rooted in our faith in God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. Of him the Apostle Paul says: “He is our peace”. And it is also in the depths of our faith, not in a shallow feeling, that there is rooted the choice of dialogue and friendship with the followers of other Religions – as the second Vatican Council affirms – in order to cooperate in efforts to promote the unity of the human family, to put an end to painful conflicts, to foster justice and the spiritual growth of humanity. Because they are rooted in our Christian faith, this dialogue, this friendship and this collaboration in the work of peace with the followers of other Religions do not in any way diminish the faithful witness that we must give together to Christ who, we believe, is the Saviour of all. This witness is induced and required by our faith.

Dear Brothers and Sisters who belong to the great world Religions, you know that in the course of my pontificate – at Assisi, here in Rome and during my visits to various countries of the world – I have met with exponents of many Religions and I have had occasion to exchange respectful sentiments of friendship: I have been able to ascertain how, despite obvious differences, a climate of dialogue and of shared responsibility is growing. The presence of worthy representatives of the world Religions, like your own presence here in Rome, cannot but confirm me in this consoling thought.

The spiritual man grows to maturity through prayer, meditation and detachment from self and from vain interests; he finds, or he is given, a wisdom which at times the world derides. Such wisdom makes him critical of the use of violence for resolving conflicts and difficulties; it also causes him to be concerned about the outbreaks of hatred. The spiritual man is a witness to peace; he seeks to uproot everywhere the sources of bitterness which can move people to violence and conflict. Thus the spiritual man can become a resource of moral energy for all who approach him. And this type of man achieves this, we know, not by seeking human approval but through obedience and submission to God, who is above and beyond him. Our father Abraham, about whom the Bible speaks and a model for so many believers, was called a friend of God for his total obedience to him; and thus he could intercede for the peace and tranquillity of the men and women of the world.

Despite the real differences existing between religions, differences which we have often frankly recognized, we have to say that dialogue, encounter, friendship and appeals to the members of each religion to deepen their commitment to prayer are unleashing profound spiritual energies.

And your meeting is a clear example of this. A new language of peace and new ways of expressing peace are being found. This new climate breaks, or at least calls into question, the fatal chain of divisions inherited from the past or generated by modern ideologies; it has inaugurated a season in which the voice of wisdom is making itself heard. And it is clear to all that the Catholic Church intends to share in and promote this season, pursuing in this regard “the ecumenical commitment and the commitment to interreligious dialogue which was recommended and promoted by the Second Vatican Council”.

While I express the hope that all of you will be builders of peace among the peoples and countries from which you come, permit me to recall the words that my predecessor, John XXIII, at the end of his life, addressed to the world as a message of peace and as a prayer to God. The concluding words of the Encyclical “Pacem in Terris” are an invocation addressed to the One who alone can evoke and strengthen the will for peace: “May he banish from the hearts of people whatever might endanger peace; may he transform them into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love. May he enlighten the rulers of peoples so that, in addition to their solicitude for the welfare of their citizens, they may also guarantee and defend the great gift of peace; may he enkindle the wills of all so that they may overcome the barriers which divide, cherish the bonds of mutual love, learn to understand one another and to pardon those who have done them wrong. By virtue of his action may all peoples of the earth become as brothers and sisters to one another, and may the peace they long for ever flower and ever reign among them”.

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