



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

SPEECH OF JOHN PAUL II

VISIT TO THE YAD VASHEM MUSEUM

Jerusalem – Yad Vashem

Thursday, 23 March 2000

The words of the ancient Psalm rise from our hearts:

“I have become like a broken vessel.

I hear the whispering of many – terror on every side! –

as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God'." (*Ps 31:13-15*).

1. In this place of memories, the mind and heart and soul feel an extreme need for silence. Silence in which to remember. Silence in which to try to make some sense of the memories which come flooding back. Silence because there are no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy of the *Shoah*. My own personal memories are of all that happened when the Nazis occupied Poland during the War. I remember my Jewish friends and neighbours, some of whom perished, while others survived.

I have come to Yad Vashem to pay homage to the millions of Jewish people who, stripped of everything, especially of their human dignity, were murdered in the Holocaust. More than half a century has passed, but the memories remain.

Here, as at Auschwitz and many other places in Europe, we are overcome by the echo of the heart-rending laments of so many. Men, women and children cry out to us from the depths of the horror that they knew. How can we fail to heed their cry? No one can forget or ignore what happened. No one can diminish its scale.

2. We wish to remember. But we wish to remember for a purpose, namely to ensure that never again will evil prevail, as it did for the millions of innocent victims of Nazism.

How could man have such utter contempt for man? Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a Godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people.

The honour given to the “just gentiles” by the State of Israel at Yad Vashem for having acted heroically to save Jews, sometimes to the point of giving their own lives, is a recognition that not even in the darkest hour is every light extinguished. That is why the Psalms, and the entire Bible, though well aware of the human capacity for evil, also proclaim that evil will not have the last word. Out of the depths of pain and sorrow, the believer’s heart cries out: “I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God’.” (*Ps 31:14*).

3. Jews and Christians share an immense spiritual patrimony, flowing from God’s self-revelation. Our religious teachings and our spiritual experience demand that we overcome evil with good. We remember, but not with any desire for vengeance or as an incentive to hatred. For us, to remember is to pray for peace and justice, and to commit ourselves to their cause. Only a world at peace, with justice for all, can avoid repeating the mistakes and terrible crimes of the past.

As Bishop of Rome and Successor of the Apostle Peter, I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church, motivated by the Gospel law of truth and love and by no political considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place. The Church rejects racism in any form as a denial of the image of the Creator inherent in every human being (cf. *Gen 1:26*).

4. In this place of solemn remembrance, I fervently pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people suffered in the twentieth century will lead to a new relationship between Christians and Jews. Let us build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Jewish feeling among Christians or anti-Christian feeling among Jews, but rather the mutual respect required of those who adore the one Creator and Lord, and look to Abraham as our common father in faith (cf. *We Remember, V*).

The world must heed the warning that comes to us from the victims of the Holocaust and from the testimony of the survivors. Here at Yad Vashem the memory lives on, and burns itself onto our souls. It makes us cry out:

“I hear the whispering of many – terror on every side! – But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God'.” (*Ps 31:13-15*).

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