



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CHIEF RABBI OF ROME,
DR. RICCARDO DI SEGNI**

Thursday, 13 February 2003

*Esteemed Chief Rabbi of Rome,
Dear Brothers in the faith of Abraham,*

1. I am glad to meet you, esteemed Dr Riccardo Di Segni, after your election as Chief Rabbi of Rome, and I cordially greet you and the representatives who have accompanied you. I renew my congratulations to you for the important office which has been entrusted to you, and on this important occasion, I would like to recall with deep esteem your illustrious predecessor, Prof. Elio Toaff.

Today's visit allows me to emphasize the deep desire of the Catholic Church to strengthen the bonds of friendship and reciprocal collaboration with the Jewish community. Here in Rome, the Synagogue, a symbol of the faith of the children of Abraham, is very close to St Peter's Basilica, the centre of the Church, and I am grateful to God who granted me on 13 April 1986, to travel the short distance that separates these two temples. That historic and unforgettable visit was a gift from the Almighty, and an important milestone on the path of understanding between Jews and Catholics. I hope that the memory of that event may continue to exercise a beneficial influence and that the path of reciprocal confidence that has developed so far will serve to intensify relations between the Catholic community and the Jewish community of Rome, the most ancient one in Western Europe.

2. It must be recognized that in the past our two communities lived side by side, at times writing "a turbulent history", that in some cases was not free of hostility and distrust. The document *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council, the gradual application of the conciliar directive, the gestures of friendship made by both parties have contributed in these years to guide our relations

towards a greater reciprocal understanding. I hope that this effort may continue, that it may be shaped by initiatives of fruitful collaboration in the social, cultural and theological fields, and may deepen the consciousness of those spiritual bonds that unite us.

3. In these days we can hear resounding in the world dangerous shouts of war. We, Jews and Catholics, perceive the urgent mission of imploring peace from God, the Creator and Eternal One, and of being ourselves peacemakers.

Shalom! This beautiful word, so dear to you, means salvation, happiness, harmony; it highlights the fact that peace is a gift of God; a fragile gift, placed in human hands, that has to be safeguarded by the dedication of our communities.

May God make us *builders of peace*, with the consciousness that, when man works for peace, he becomes capable of making the world better.

Shalom! This is my cordial greeting to you and to the entire Jewish community of Rome. May God, in his goodness, protect and bless each one of us. May he especially bless all who forge a path of friendship and peace among the men and women of every race and culture.