



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

"Ben Gurion" International Airport - Tel Aviv
Friday, 15 May 2009

Mr President,
Mr Prime Minister,
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I prepare to return to Rome, may I share with you some of the powerful impressions that my pilgrimage to the Holy Land has left with me. I had fruitful discussions with the civil authorities both in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories, and I witnessed the great efforts that both governments are making to secure people's well-being. I have met the leaders of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, and I rejoice to see the way that they work together in caring for the Lord's flock. I have also had the opportunity to meet the leaders of the various Christian Churches and ecclesial communities as well as the leaders of other religions in the Holy Land. This land is indeed a fertile ground for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, and I pray that the rich variety of religious witness in the region will bear fruit in a growing mutual understanding and respect.

Mr President, you and I planted an olive tree at your residence on the day that I arrived in Israel. The olive tree, as you know, is an image used by Saint Paul to describe the very close relations between Christians and Jews. Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans how the Church of the Gentiles is like a wild olive shoot, grafted onto the cultivated olive tree which is the People of the

Covenant (cf. 11:17-24). We are nourished from the same spiritual roots. We meet as brothers, brothers who at times in our history have had a tense relationship, but now are firmly committed to building bridges of lasting friendship.

The ceremony at the Presidential Palace was followed by one of the most solemn moments of my stay in Israel – my visit to the Holocaust Memorial at Yad Vashem, where I paid my respects to the victims of the *Shoah*. There also I met some of the survivors. Those deeply moving encounters brought back memories of my visit three years ago to the death camp at Auschwitz, where so many Jews - mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends - were brutally exterminated under a godless regime that propagated an ideology of anti-Semitism and hatred. That appalling chapter of history must never be forgotten or denied. On the contrary, those dark memories should strengthen our determination to draw closer to one another as branches of the same olive tree, nourished from the same roots and united in brotherly love.

Mr President, I thank you for the warmth of your hospitality, which is greatly appreciated, and I wish to put on record that I came to visit this country as a friend of the Israelis, just as I am a friend of the Palestinian people. Friends enjoy spending time in one another's company, and they find it deeply distressing to see one another suffer. No friend of the Israelis and the Palestinians can fail to be saddened by the continuing tension between your two peoples. No friend can fail to weep at the suffering and loss of life that both peoples have endured over the last six decades. Allow me to make this appeal to all the people of these lands: No more bloodshed! No more fighting! No more terrorism! No more war! Instead let us break the vicious circle of violence. Let there be lasting peace based on justice, let there be genuine reconciliation and healing. Let it be universally recognized that the State of Israel has the right to exist, and to enjoy peace and security within internationally agreed borders. Let it be likewise acknowledged that the Palestinian people have a right to a sovereign independent homeland, to live with dignity and to travel freely. Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream. And let peace spread outwards from these lands, let them serve as a "light to the nations" (Is 42:6), bringing hope to the many other regions that are affected by conflict.

One of the saddest sights for me during my visit to these lands was the wall. As I passed alongside it, I prayed for a future in which the peoples of the Holy Land can live together in peace and harmony without the need for such instruments of security and separation, but rather respecting and trusting one another, and renouncing all forms of violence and aggression. Mr President, I know how hard it will be to achieve that goal. I know how difficult is your task, and that of the Palestinian Authority. But I assure you that my prayers and the prayers of Catholics across the world are with you as you continue your efforts to build a just and lasting peace in this region.

It remains only for me to express my heartfelt thanks to all who have contributed in so many ways to my visit. To the Government, the organizers, the volunteers, the media, to all who have provided hospitality to me and those accompanying me, I am deeply grateful. Please be assured

that you are remembered with affection in my prayers. To all of you, I say: thank you, and may God be with you. Shalom!

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