



The Holy See

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

VISIT TO THE "REGINA PACIS CENTER"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Amman
Friday, 8 May 2009

Your Beatitudes,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

I am very happy to be here with you this afternoon, and to greet each of you and your family members, wherever they may be. I thank His Beatitude Patriarch Fouad Twal for his kind words of welcome and in a special way I wish to acknowledge the presence among us of Bishop Selim Sayegh, whose vision and labours for this Centre, together with those of His Beatitude Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, are today honored through the blessing of the new extensions which has just taken place. I also wish to greet with great affection the Central Committee members, the Comboni Sisters and the dedicated lay staff, including those who work in the Centre's many community branches and units. Your reputation for outstanding professional competence, compassionate care and resolute promotion of the rightful place in society of those with special needs is well known here and throughout the Kingdom. To the young people present, I thank you for your moving welcome. It is a great joy for me to be with you.

As you know, my visit to the Our Lady of Peace Centre here in Amman is the first stop along my journey of pilgrimage. Like countless pilgrims before me it is now my turn to satisfy that profound wish to touch, to draw solace from and to venerate the places where Jesus lived, the places which were made holy by his presence. Since apostolic times, Jerusalem has been the primary place of

pilgrimage for Christians, but earlier still, in the ancient Near East, Semitic peoples built sacred shrines in order to mark and commemorate a divine presence or action. And ordinary people would travel to these centres carrying a portion of the fruits of their land and livestock to offer in homage and thanksgiving.

Dear friends, every one of us is a pilgrim. We are all drawn forward, with purpose, along God's path. Naturally, then, we tend to look back on life – sometimes with regrets or hurts, often with thanksgiving and appreciation – and we also look ahead – sometimes with trepidation or anxiety, but always with expectation and hope, knowing too that there are others who encourage us along the way. I know that the journeys that have led many of you to the “Regina Pacis” Centre have been marked by suffering or trial. Some of you struggle courageously with disabilities, others of you have endured rejection, and some of you are drawn to this place of peace simply for encouragement and support. Of particular importance, I know, is the Centre's great success in promoting the rightful place of the disabled in society and in ensuring that suitable training and opportunities are provided to facilitate such integration. For this foresight and determination you all deserve great praise and encouragement!

At times it is difficult to find a reason for what appears only as an obstacle to be overcome or even as pain – physical or emotional – to be endured. Yet faith and understanding help us to see a horizon beyond our own selves in order to imagine life as God does. God's unconditional love, which gives life to every human individual, points to a meaning and purpose for all human life. His is a saving love (cf. Jn 12:32). As Christians profess, it is through the Cross that Jesus in fact draws us into eternal life, and in so doing indicates to us the way ahead – the way of hope which guides every step we take along the way, so that we too become bearers of that hope and charity for others.

Friends, unlike the pilgrims of old, I do not come bearing gifts or offerings. I come simply with one intention, a hope: to pray for the precious gift of unity and peace, most specifically for the Middle East. Peace for individuals, for parents and children, for communities, peace for Jerusalem, for the Holy Land, for the region, peace for the entire human family; the lasting peace born of justice, integrity and compassion, the peace that arises from humility, forgiveness and the profound desire to live in harmony as one.

Prayer is hope in action. And in fact true reason is contained in prayer: we come into loving contact with the one God, the universal Creator, and in so doing we come to realize the futility of human divisions and prejudices and we sense the wondrous possibilities that open up before us when our hearts are converted to God's truth, to his design for each of us and our world.

Dear young friends, to you in particular I wish to say that standing in your midst I draw strength from God. Your experience of trials, your witness to compassion, and your determination to overcome the obstacles you encounter, encourage me in the belief that suffering can bring about

change for the good. In our own trials, and standing alongside others in their struggles, we glimpse the essence of our humanity, we become, as it were, more human. And we come to learn that, on another plane, even hearts hardened by cynicism or injustice or unwillingness to forgive are never beyond the reach of God, can always be opened to a new way of being, a vision of peace.

I exhort you all to pray every day for our world. And today I want to ask you to take up a specific task: please pray for me every day of my pilgrimage; for my own spiritual renewal in the Lord, and for the conversion of hearts to God's way of forgiveness and solidarity so that my hope – our hope – for unity and peace in the world will bear abundant fruit.

May God bless each of you and your families, and the teachers, caregivers, administrators and benefactors of this Centre and may Our Lady, Queen of Peace, protect you and guide you along the pilgrim way of her Son, the Good Shepherd. Thank you for your attention.

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