



The Holy See

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

COURTESY VISIT
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

Presidential Palace - Jerusalem

Monday, 11 May 2009

Mr President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a kind gesture of hospitality President Peres has welcomed us here to his residence, enabling me to greet you all and to have this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you. Mr President, I thank you for this gracious welcome, and for your courteous greeting which I warmly reciprocate. I also thank the singers and musicians who have entertained us with their fine performance.

Mr President, in the message of congratulations which I sent to you on the occasion of your inauguration, I gladly recalled your distinguished record of public service marked by a strong commitment to the pursuit of justice and peace. This afternoon I wish to assure you and the new Government, and all the people of the State of Israel that my pilgrimage to the holy places is one of prayer for the precious gift of unity and peace for the Middle East and for all humanity. Indeed, I pray daily for peace born of justice to return to the Holy Land and the entire region, bringing security and renewed hope for all.

Peace is above all a divine gift. For peace is the Almighty's promise to humanity, and harbors unity. In the book of the prophet Jeremiah we read: "I know the plans I have in mind for you – it is the Lord who speaks – plans for peace not disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11-12). The prophet reminds us of the Almighty's promise that he can "be found", that he "will listen", that he "will gather us together as one". But there is a proviso: we must "seek him", and "seek him with all our heart" (cf. *ibid.*, 12-14).

To the religious leaders present this afternoon, I wish to say that the particular contribution of religions to the quest for peace lies primarily in the wholehearted, united search for God. Ours is the task of proclaiming and witnessing that the Almighty is present and knowable even when he seems hidden from our sight, that he acts in our world for our good, and that a society's future is marked with hope when it resonates in harmony with his divine order. It is God's dynamic presence that draws hearts together and ensures unity. In fact, the ultimate foundation of unity among persons lies in the perfect oneness and universality of God, who created man and woman in his image and likeness in order to draw us into his own divine life so that all may be one.

Religious leaders must therefore be mindful that any division or tension, any tendency to introversion or suspicion among believers or between our communities, can easily lead to a contradiction which obscures the Almighty's oneness, betrays our unity, and contradicts the One who reveals himself as "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6; Ps 138:2; Ps 85:11). My friends: Jerusalem, which has long been a crossroads for peoples of many different origins, is a city which affords Jews, Christians and Muslims both the duty and the privilege to bear witness together to the peaceful coexistence long desired by worshippers of the one God; to lay bare the Almighty's plan for the unity of the human family announced to Abraham; and to proclaim the true nature of man as a seeker of God. Let us resolve to ensure that through the teaching and guidance of our respective communities we shall assist them to be true to who they are as believers, ever aware of the infinite goodness of God, the inviolable dignity of every human being, and the unity of the entire human family.

Sacred Scripture also presents us with an understanding of security. According to the Hebrew usage, security – *batah* – arises from trust and refers not just to the absence of threat but also to the sentiment of calmness and confidence. In the book of the prophet Isaiah we read of a time of divine blessing: "Once more the Spirit is poured upon us... and justice will dwell in the wilderness and integrity in the fertile land; integrity will bring peace, and justice everlasting security" (Is 32:15-17). Security, integrity, justice and peace. In God's design for the world, these are inseparable. Far from being simply products of human endeavor, they are values which stem from God's fundamental relationship with man, and dwell as a common patrimony in the heart of every individual.

There is only one way to protect and promote these values: exercise them! Live them! No individual, family, community or nation is exempt from the duty to live in justice and to work for

peace. And naturally, civic and political leaders are expected to ensure just and proper security for the people whom they have been elected to serve. That objective forms a part of the rightful promotion of values common to humanity and thus cannot conflict with the unity of the human family. The authentic values and goals of a society, which always safeguard human dignity, are indivisible, universal and interdependent (cf. *Address to the United Nations*, 18 April 2008). Thus they cannot be satisfied when they fall prey to particular interests or piecemeal politics. A nation's true interest is always served by the pursuit of justice for all.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, lasting security is a matter of trust, nurtured in justice and integrity, and sealed through the conversion of hearts which stirs us to look the other in the eye, and to recognize the "Thou", as my equal, my brother, my sister. In this way does not society itself become the "fruitful field" (Is 32:15) marked, not by blocks or obstructions, but by cohesion and vibrancy? Can it not become a community with noble aspirations where all are willingly afforded access to education, family housing and the opportunity for employment, a society ready to build upon the lasting foundations of hope?

To conclude, I would like to turn to the ordinary families of this city, of this country. What parents would ever want violence, insecurity, or disunity for their son or daughter? What humane political end can ever be served through conflict and violence? I hear the cry of those who live in this land for justice, for peace, for respect for their dignity, for lasting security, a daily life free from the fear of outside threats and senseless violence. And I know that considerable numbers of men and women and young people are working for peace and solidarity through cultural programs and through initiatives of compassionate and practical outreach; humble enough to forgive, they have the courage to grasp the dream that is their right.

Mr President, I thank you for the courtesy you have shown to me and I assure you again of my prayers for the Government and all the citizens of this State. May a genuine conversion of the hearts of all lead to an ever strengthening commitment to peace and security through justice for everyone.

Shalom!

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The following is a summary of the gestures and words of welcome which preceded the delivery of the formal address given above:

"The Holy Father was greeted by three Israeli girls in English, Hebrew and Arabic and invited to taste a fig representing the "fruits from the State of Israel". The young people also offered His Holiness a sheaf of wheat, developed at the Volcani Center of the Agricultural Research Organization, with the potential to produce a double yield. President Peres announced that this

specially designed crop “contains an answer to starvation” and has been named after His Holiness.

His Excellency expressed his admiration for Pope Benedict as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church. The President then thanked His Holiness for [his address during the welcoming ceremony at Ben Gurion Airport](#). He spoke of his particular appreciation for the Holy Father’s words in regard to the Holocaust, its victims and anti-Semitism, saying that the speech “really aimed at the most difficult part of our life, the most penetrating problems”.

The Holy Father expressed his happiness to be in Israel, his deep appreciation for the cordial welcome and for the presentation of the “Wheat of Pope Benedict XVI” and the other gifts. His Holiness reiterated his conviction that Israel is a land very important for peace throughout the world, highlighting that “your prophets are our prophets” and “your fathers are our fathers”. In closing, the Holy Father expressed his hope that Christians and Jews would continue their efforts to understand one another as brothers and sisters, and so cooperate to promote peace throughout the world."

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