



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO PERUGIA AND ASSISI

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES AND OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Basilica of Saint Francis

27 October 1986

*My Brothers and Sisters,
Heads and Representatives of the Christian Churches
and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,
Dear Friends,*

1. IN CONCLUDING this World Day of Prayer for Peace, to which you have come from many parts of the world, kindly accepting my invitation, I would like now to express my feelings, as a brother and friend, but also as a believer in Jesus Christ, and, in the Catholic Church, the first witness of faith in him.

In relation to the last prayer, the Christian one, in the series we have all heard, I profess here anew my conviction, shared by all Christians, that in Jesus Christ, as Saviour of all, true peace is to be found, "peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near". His birth was greeted by the angels' song: "Glory to God in the highest and peace among men with whom he is pleased". He preached love among all, even among foes, proclaimed blessed those who work for peace and through his Death and Resurrection he brought about reconciliation between heaven and earth. To use an expression of Paul the Apostle: "He is our peace".

2. It is, in fact, my faith conviction which has made me turn to you, representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and World Religions, in deep love and respect.

With the other Christians we share many convictions and, particularly, in what concerns peace. With the World Religions we share a common respect of and obedience to conscience, which teaches all of us to seek the truth, to love and serve all individuals and people, and therefore to make peace among nations.

Yes, we all hold conscience and obedience to the voice of conscience to be an essential element in the road towards a better and peaceful world.

Could it be otherwise, since all men and women in this world have a common nature, a common origin and a common destiny?

If there are many and important differences among us, there is also a common ground, whence to operate together in the solution of this dramatic challenge of our age: true peace or catastrophic war?

3. Yes, there is the dimension of prayer, which in the very real diversity of religions tries to express communication with a Power above all our human forces.

Peace depends basically on this Power, which we call God, and as Christians believe has revealed himself in Christ.

This is the meaning of this World Day of Prayer.

For the first time in history, we have come together from every where, Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and World Religions, in this sacred place dedicated to Saint Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace.

The form and content of our prayers are very different, as we have seen, and there can be no question of reducing them to a kind of common denominator.

4. Yes, in this very difference we have perhaps discovered anew that, regarding the problem of peace and its relation to religious commitment, there is something which binds us together.

The challenge of peace, as it is presently posed to every human conscience, is the problem of a reasonable quality of life for all, the problem of survival for humanity, the problem of life and death. In the face of such a problem, two things seem to have supreme importance and both of them are common to us all.

The first is the inner imperative of the moral conscience, which enjoins us to respect, protect and promote human life, from the womb to the deathbed, for individuals and peoples, but especially for

the weak, the destitute, the derelict: the imperative to overcome selfishness, greed and the spirit of vengeance.

The second common thing is the conviction that peace goes much beyond human efforts, particularly in the present plight of the world, and therefore that its source and realization is to be sought in that Reality beyond all of us.

This is why each of us prays for peace. Even if we think, as we do, that the relation between that Reality and the gift of peace is a different one, according to our respective religious convictions, we all affirm that such a relation exists.

This is what we express by praying for it.

I humbly repeat here my own conviction: peace bears the name of Jesus Christ.

5. But, at the same time and in the same breath, I am ready to acknowledge that Catholics have not always been faithful to this affirmation of faith. We have not been always "peacemakers".

For ourselves, therefore, but also perhaps, in a sense, for all, his encounter at Assisi is an act of penance. We have prayed, each in his own way, we have fasted, we have marched together. In this way we have tried to open our hearts to the divine reality beyond us and to our fellow men and women.

Yes, while we have fasted, we have kept in mind the sufferings which senseless wars have brought about and are still bringing about on humanity. Thereby we have tried to be spiritually close to the millions who are the victims of hunger throughout the world.

While we have walked in silence, we have reflected on the path our human family treads: either in hostility, if we fail to accept one another in love; or as a common journey to our lofty destiny, if we realize that other people are our brothers and sisters. The very fact that we have come to Assisi from various quarters of the world is in itself a sign of this common path which humanity is called to tread. Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others. We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us.

Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage.

6. This Day at Assisi has helped us become more aware of our religious commitments. But it has also made the world, looking at us through the media, more aware of the responsibility of each

religion regarding problems of war and peace.

More perhaps than ever before in history, the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all.

What a tremendous weight for human shoulders to carry! But at the same time what a marvellous, exhilarating call to follow.

Although prayer is in itself action, this does not excuse us from working for peace. Here we are acting as the heralds of the moral awareness of humanity as such, humanity that wants peace, needs peace.

7. There is no peace without a passionate love for peace. There is no peace without a relentless determination to achieve peace.

Peace awaits its prophets. Together we have filled our eyes with visions of peace: they release energies for a new language of peace, for new gestures of peace, gestures which will shatter the fatal chains of divisions inherited from history or spawned by modern ideologies.

Peace awaits its builders. Let us stretch our hands towards our brothers and sisters, to encourage them to build peace upon the four pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom.

Peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists. Peace is a universal responsibility: it comes about through a thousand little acts in daily life. By their daily way of living with others, people choose for or against peace. We entrust the cause of peace especially to the young. May young people help to free history from the wrong paths along which humanity strays.

Peace is in the hands not only of individuals but of nations. It is the nations that have the honour of basing their peacemaking activity upon the conviction of the sacredness of human dignity and the recognition of the unquestionable equality of people with one another. We earnestly invite the leaders of the nations and of the international organizations to be untiring in bringing in structures of dialogue wherever peace is under threat or already compromised. We offer our support to their often exhausting efforts to maintain or restore peace. We renew our encouragement to the United Nations Organization, that it may respond fully to the breadth and height of its universal mission of peace.

8. In answer to the appeal I made from Lyons in France, on the day which we Catholics celebrate as the feast of Saint Francis, we hope that arms have fallen silent, that attacks have ceased. This would be a first significant result of the spiritual efficacy of prayer. In fact, this appeal has been shared by many hearts and lips everywhere in the world, especially where people suffer from war and its consequences. It is vital to choose peace and the means to obtain it. Peace, so frail in

health, demands constant and intensive care. Along this path, we shall advance with sure and redoubled steps, for there is no doubt that people have and never had so many means for building true peace as today. Humanity has entered an era of increased solidarity and hunger for social justice. This is our chance. It is also our task, which prayer helps us to face.

9. What we have done today at Assisi, praying and witnessing to our commitment to peace, we must continue to do every day of our life. For what we have done today's is vital for the world. If the world is going to continue, and men and women are to survive in it, the world cannot do without prayer.

This is the permanent lesson of Assisi: it is the lesson of Saint Francis who embodied an attractive ideal for us; it is the lesson of Saint Clare, his first follower. It is an ideal composed of meekness, humility, a deep sense of God and a commitment to serve all. Saint Francis was a man of peace.

We recall that he abandoned the military career he had followed for a while in his youth, and discovered the value of poverty, the value of a simple and austere life, in imitation of Jesus Christ whom he intended to serve. Saint Clare was the woman, par excellence, of prayer. Her union with God in prayer sustained Francis and his followers, as it sustains us today. Francis and Clare are examples of peace: with God, with oneself, with all men and women in this world. May this holy man and this holy woman inspire all people today to have the same strength of character and love of God and neighbour to continue on the path we must walk together.

10. Moved by the example of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, true disciples of Christ, and newly convinced by the experience of this day we have lived through together, we commit ourselves to re-examine our consciences, to hear its voice more faithfully, to purify our spirits from prejudice, anger, enmity, jealousy and envy. We will seek to be peacemakers in thought and deed, with mind and heart fixed on the unity of the human family. And we call on all our brothers and sisters who hear us to do the same.

We do this with a sense of our own human limitations and with an awareness of the fact that by ourselves alone we will fail. We therefore reaffirm and acknowledge that our future life and peace depend always on God's gift to us.

In that spirit, we invite the leaders of the world to know that we humbly implore God for peace. But we also ask them to recognize their responsibilities and recommit themselves to the task of peace, to put into action the strategies of peace with courage and vision.

11. Let me now turn to each of you, representatives of Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and World Religions, who have come to Assisi for this day of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

I thank you again for having accepted my invitation to come here for this act of witness before the world.

I also extend my thanks to all those who have made possible our presence here, particularly our brothers and sisters in Assisi.

And above all I thank God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ, for this day of grace for the world, for each of you, and for myself. I do this in the words attributed to Saint Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; / where there is hatred, let me sow love; / where there is injury, pardon; / where there is doubt, faith; / where there is despair, hope; / where there is darkness, light; / and where there is sadness, joy. / O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Greetings in other languages:

A TOUTES les hautes personnalités présentes et à tous ceux qui se sont associés à cette initiative de prière, j'adresse un salut fraternel et un message d'espérance: la paix est possible, si tous les hommes veulent progresser dans la vérité, fondement de la paix.

Pour la première fois sans doute dans l'histoire humaine, Eglises chrétiennes et religions de toutes les parties du monde se sont réunies en un même lieu pour montrer que la paix est un impératif de la conscience des croyants engagés dans la recherche de la vérité sur Dieu, sur notre destinée, sur l'histoire de l'humanité.

J'invite tous les hommes de bonne volonté à s'engager avec une générosité renouvelée pour la promotion de la paix.

Deseo presentar mi más cordial saludo, junto con mi vivo agradecimiento, a todas las personas que desde aquí o desde cualquier parte del mundo han querido asociarse a esta Jornada Mundial de Oración por la Paz.

Hago votos y aliento a todos a un renovado compromiso a ser constructores de paz entre las naciones, entre los pueblos, en las sociedades, en las familias, en los corazones y en la conciencia de cada uno.

Agradeço a todas as pessoas que, de uma ou de outra forma, se associaram conosco a - esta iniciativa de oração. Cada um se sinta pessoalmente empenhado em ser testemunha da - paz e pacificador dos homens, e compromissado com a realização de uma sociedade mais fraterna.

Aufrichtung danke ich allen, die sich nah und fern, einzeln oder in Gemeinschaft, unserem heutigen Gebet für den Frieden in der Welt angeschlossen haben. Ich ermutige euch, darin auch in Zukunft nicht nachzulassen und im Geiste Jesus Christi in der eigenen Familie, im Beruf und im Leben der Gesellschaft selber immer mehr zu Friedensstiftern zu werden. Der Friede Christi sei mit euch allen!

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