The Holy See

INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF PRAYER FOR PEACE:
"NO ONE IS SAVED ALONE. PEACE AND FRATERNITY"

Church of Saint Maria in Aracoeli - Piazza del Campidoglio
Tuesday, 20 October 2020

[Multimedia]

- Homily of the Holy Father
- Address of his Holiness
- Appeal for peace

MOMENT OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER FOR PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Church of Saint Maria in Aracoeli

It is a gift to pray together. I greet all of you cordially and with gratitude, especially my brother, His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and dear Bishop Heinrich, President of the Council of the Evangelical Church of Germany. Sadly, Justin, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was unable to be here because of the pandemic.

The passage from the account of the Lord's Passion that we have just heard comes shortly before Jesus' death. It speaks of the temptation he experienced amid the agony of the cross. At the supreme moment of his sufferings and love, many of those present cruelly taunted him with the words: "Save yourself!" (*Mk* 15:30). This is a great temptation. It spares no one, including us Christians. The temptation to think only of saving ourselves and our own circle. To focus only on

our own problems and interests, as if nothing else mattered. It is a very human instinct, but wrong. It was the final temptation of the crucified God.

Save yourself. These words were spoken first “by those who passed by” (v. 29). They were ordinary people, those who had heard Jesus teach and who witnessed his miracles. Now they are telling him, “Save yourself, come down from the cross”. They had no pity, they only wanted miracles; they wanted to see Jesus descend from the cross. Sometimes we too prefer a wonder-working god to one who is compassionate, a god powerful in the eyes of the world, who shows his might and scatters those who wish us ill. But this is not God, but our own creation. How often do we want a god in our own image, rather than to become conformed to his own image. We want a god like ourselves, rather than becoming ourselves like God. In this way, we prefer the worship of ourselves to the worship of God. Such worship is nurtured and grows through *indifference toward others*. Those passersby were only interested in Jesus for the satisfaction of their own desires. Jesus, reduced to an outcast hanging on the cross, was no longer of interest to them. He was before their eyes, yet far from their hearts. Indifference kept them far from the true face of God.

Save yourself. The next people to speak those words were the chief priests and the scribes. They were the ones who had condemned Jesus, for they considered him dangerous. All of us, though, are specialists in crucifying others to save ourselves. Yet Jesus allowed himself to be crucified, in order to teach us not to shift evil to others. The chief priests accused him precisely because of what he had done for others: “He saved *others* and cannot save himself!"(v. 31). They knew Jesus; they remembered the healings and liberating miracles he performed, but they drew a malicious conclusion. For them, saving others, coming to their aid, is useless; Jesus, who gave himself unreservedly for others was himself lost! The mocking tone of the accusation is garbed in religious language, twice using the verb *to save*. But the “gospel” of *save yourself* is not the Gospel of salvation. It is the falsest of the apocryphal gospels, making others carry the cross. Whereas the true Gospel bids us take up the cross of others.

Save yourself. Finally, those who were crucified alongside Jesus also joined in taunting him. How easy it is to criticize, to speak against others, to point to the evil in others but not in ourselves, even to blaming the weak and the outcast! But why were they upset with Jesus? Because he did not take them down from the cross they said to him: “Save yourself *and us*!” (*Lk* 23:39). They looked to Jesus only to resolve their problems. Yet God does not come only to free us from our ever-present daily problems, but rather to liberate us from the real problem, which is the lack of love. This is the primary cause of our personal, social, international and environmental ills. Thinking only of ourselves: this is the father of all evils. Yet one of the thieves then looks at Jesus and sees in him a humble love. He entered heaven by doing one thing alone: turning his concern from himself to Jesus, from himself to the person next to him (cf. v. 42).

Dear brothers and sisters, Calvary was the site of a great “duel” between God, who came to save us, and man, who wants to save only himself; between faith in God and worship of self; between

man who accuses and God who excuses. In the end, God's victory was revealed; his mercy came down upon the earth. From the cross forgiveness poured forth and fraternal love was reborn: “the Cross makes us brothers and sisters” (BENEDICT XVI, *Address at the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum*, 21 March 2008). Jesus’ arms, outstretched on the cross, mark the turning point, for God points a finger at no one, but instead embraces all. For love alone extinguishes hatred, love alone can ultimately triumph over injustice. Love alone makes room for others. Love alone is the path towards full communion among us.

Let us look upon the crucified God and ask him to grant us the grace to be more united and more fraternal. When we are tempted to follow the way of this world, may we be reminded of Jesus's words: “Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel’s will save it” (*Mk* 8:35). What is counted loss in the eyes of the world is, for us, salvation. May we learn from the Lord, who saved us by emptying himself (cf. *Phil* 2:7) and *becoming other*: from being God, he became man; from spirit, he became flesh; from a king, he became a slave. He asks us to do the same, to humble ourselves, to “become other” in order to reach out to others. The closer we become to the Lord Jesus, the more we will be open and “universal”, since we will feel responsible for others. And others will become the means of our own salvation: all others, every human person, whatever his or her history and beliefs. Beginning with the poor, who are those most like Christ. The great Archbishop of Constantinople, Saint John Chrysostom, once wrote: “If there were no poor, the greater part of our salvation would be overthrown” (*On the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, XVII, 2). May the Lord help us to journey together on the path of fraternity, and thus to become credible witnesses of the living God.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Piazza del Campidoglio

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I rejoice and give thanks to God that here on the Capitoline Hill, in the heart of Rome, I can meet with you, distinguished religious leaders, public authorities and so many friends of peace. At each other’s side, we have prayed for peace. I greet the President of the Italian Republic, the Honourable Sergio Mattarella. I am happy to encounter once more my brother, the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew. I am most grateful that, despite the difficulties of travel these days, he and other leaders wished to take part in this prayer meeting. In the spirit of the Assisi Meeting called by Saint John Paul II in 1986, the Community of Sant’Egidio celebrates annually, in different cities, this moment of prayer and dialogue for peace among believers of various religions.

The Assisi meeting and its vision of peace contained a prophetic seed that by God’s grace has gradually matured through unprecedented encounters, acts of peacemaking and fresh initiatives of

fraternity. Although the intervening years have witnessed painful events, including conflicts, terrorism and radicalism, at times in the name of religion, we must also acknowledge the fruitful steps undertaken in the dialogue between the religions. This is a sign of hope that encourages us to continue cooperating as brothers and sisters. In this way, we arrived at the important *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, which I signed with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in 2019.

Indeed, "the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depths of the religious traditions" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 284). Believers have understood that religious differences do not justify indifference or enmity. Rather, on the basis of our religious faith we are enabled to become peacemakers, rather than standing passively before the evil of war and hatred. Religions stand at the service of peace and fraternity. For this reason, our present gathering also represents an incentive to religious leaders and to all believers to pray fervently for peace, never resigned to war, but working with the gentle strength of faith to end conflicts.

We need peace! More peace! "We cannot remain indifferent. Today the world has a profound thirst for peace. In many countries, people are suffering due to wars which, though often forgotten, are always the cause of suffering and poverty" (*Address to Participants in the World Day of Prayer for Peace*, Assisi, 20 January 2016). The world, political life and public opinion all run the risk of growing inured to the evil of war, as if it were simply a part of human history. "Let us not remain mired in theoretical discussions, but touch the wounded flesh of the victims… Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation and chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261). Today the sufferings of war are aggravated by the suffering caused by the coronavirus and the impossibility, in many countries, of access to necessary care.

In the meantime, conflicts continue, bringing in their wake suffering and death. To put an end to war is a solemn duty before God incumbent on all those holding political responsibilities. Peace is the priority of all politics. God will ask an accounting of those who failed to seek peace, or who fomented tensions and conflicts. He will call them to account for all the days, months and years of war that have passed and been endured by the world's peoples!

The words Jesus spoke to Peter are incisive and full of wisdom: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (*Mt* 26:52). Those who wield the sword, possibly in the belief that it will resolve difficult situations quickly, will know in their own lives, the lives of their loved ones and the lives of their countries, the death brought by the sword. "Enough!" says Jesus (*Lk* 22:38), when his disciples produce two swords before the Passion. "Enough!" That is his unambiguous response to any form of violence. That single word of Jesus echoes through the centuries and reaches us forcefully in our own time: enough of swords, weapons, violence and war!

Saint Paul VI echoed that word in his appeal to the United Nations in 1965: “No more war!” This is our plea, and that of all men and women of goodwill. It is the dream of all who strive work for peace in the realization that “every war leaves our world worse than it was before” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261).

How do we find a way out of intransigent and festering conflicts? How do we untangle the knots so many armed struggles? How do we prevent conflicts? How do we inspire thoughts of peace in warlords and those who rely on the strength of arms? No people, no social group, can *single-handedly* achieve peace, prosperity, security and happiness. None. The lesson learned from the recent pandemic, if we wish to be honest, is “the awareness that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 32).

Fraternity, born of the realization that we are a single human family, must penetrate the life of peoples, communities, government leaders and international assemblies. This will help everyone to understand that we can only be saved together through encounter and negotiation, setting aside our conflicts and pursuing reconciliation, moderating the language of politics and propaganda, and developing true paths of peace (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 231).

We have gathered this evening, as persons of different religious traditions, in order to send a message of peace. To show clearly that the religions do not want war and, indeed, disown those who would enshrine violence. That they ask everyone to pray for reconciliation and to strive to enable fraternity to pave new paths of hope. For indeed, with God's help, it will be possible to build a world of peace, and thus, brothers and sisters, to be saved together. Thank you.

APPEAL FOR PEACE*Piazza del Campidoglio*

Gathered in Rome, in “the spirit of Assisi”, and spiritually united to believers worldwide and to all men and women of good will, we have prayed alongside one another to invoke upon our world the gift of peace. We have called to mind the wounds of humanity, we are united with the silent prayers of so many of our suffering brothers and sisters, all too often nameless and unheard. We now solemnly commit ourselves to make our own and to propose to the leaders of nations and the citizens of the world this Appeal for Peace.

On this Capitoline Hill, in the wake of the greatest conflict in history, the nations that had been at war made a pact based on a dream of unity that later came true: the dream of a united Europe. Today, in these uncertain times, as we feel the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic that threatens peace by aggravating inequalities and fear, we firmly state that no one can be saved alone: no people, no single individual!

Wars and peace, pandemics and health care, hunger and access to food, global warming and

sustainable development, the displacement of populations, the elimination of nuclear threats and the reduction of inequalities: these are not matters that concern individual nations alone. We understand this better nowadays, in a world that is amply connected, yet often lacks a sense of fraternity. All of us are brothers and sisters! Let us pray to the Most High that, after this time of trial, there may no longer be “others”, but rather, a great “we”, rich in diversity. The time has come to boldly dream anew that peace is possible, that it is necessary, that a world without war is not utopian. This is why we want to say once more: “No more war”!

Tragically, for many, war once again seems to be one possible means of resolving international disputes. It is not. Before it is too late, we would remind everyone that war always leaves the world worse than it was. War is a failure of politics and of humanity.

We appeal to government leaders to reject the language of division, often based on fear and mistrust, and to avoid embarking on paths of no return. Together let us look at the victims. All too many conflicts are presently in course.

To leaders of nations we say: let us work together to create a new architecture of peace. Let us join forces to promote life, health, education and peace. The time has come to divert the resources employed in producing ever more destructive and deadly weapons to choosing life and to caring for humanity and our common home. Let us waste no time! Let us start with achievable goals: may we immediately unite our efforts to contain the spread of the virus until there is a vaccine that is suitable and available to all. The pandemic is reminding us that we are blood brothers and sisters.

To all believers, and to men and women of good will, we say: let us become creative artisans of peace, let us build social friendship, let us make our own the culture of dialogue. Honest, persistent and courageous dialogue is the antidote to distrust, division and violence. Dialogue dismantles at the outset the arguments for wars that destroy the fraternity to which our human family is called.

No one can feel exempted from this. All of us have a shared responsibility. All of us need to forgive and to be forgiven. The injustices of the world and of history are not healed by hatred and revenge, but by dialogue and forgiveness.

May God inspire in us a commitment to these ideals and to the journey that we are making together. May he touch every heart and make us heralds of peace.

Rome, Capitoline Hill, 20 October 2020

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