The Holy See

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INVOCATION FOR PEACE IN THE HOLY LAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Gardens
Friday, 7 June 2024

[Multimedia]

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Ambassadors,
Dear brothers and sisters,

I thank you for coming here to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Invocation for Peace in the Holy Land. Thank you.

At that time, the late President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, accepted my invitation to come here to implore from God the gift of peace. Some weeks prior to that, I had been a pilgrim in the Holy Land and had expressed a great desire that these two leaders might meet, in order to carry out a significant and historic gesture of dialogue and peace. I still give immense and heartfelt gratitude to the Lord for that day, and I cherish the memory of the emotional embrace exchanged by the two Presidents, in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew, and representatives of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities in Jerusalem.

Today, it is important to remember that event, especially in light of what is sadly happening in Palestine and in Israel. For months now, we have witnessed an escalating wave of hostility, and we see many people, many innocent people dying before our eyes. All this suffering, the brutality of war, the violence it unleashes and the hatred it sows even among future generations should

convince us all that “every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261).

For this reason, instead of deceiving ourselves that war can resolve problems and bring about peace, we need to be vigilant and critical towards an ideology that is unfortunately dominant today, which claims that “conflict, violence and breakdown are part of the normal functioning of a society” (*ibid.*, 236). What is really at stake are the power struggles between different social groups, partisan economic interests, and international political manoeuvrings aimed at an apparent peace yet fleeing from real problems.

At a time marked by tragic conflicts, there is need for a renewed commitment to building a peaceful world. To all, believers and people of good will, I wish to say: let us not cease to dream of peace and to build relationships of peace!

Every day I pray that this war will finally end. I think of all who suffer in Israel and in Palestine: Christians, Jews and Muslims. I think of how urgent it is that from the rubble of Gaza a decision to stop the weapons will finally arise, and therefore I ask that there be a ceasefire. I think of the families and of the Israeli hostages and ask that they be released as soon as possible. I think of the Palestinian population and ask that they be protected and receive all necessary humanitarian aid. I think of the many who are displaced due to the fighting and ask that their homes be rebuilt soon so that they can return to them in peace. I think too of those Palestinians and Israelis of good will who, amid tears and suffering, continue to hope for the coming of a new day and strive to bring forth the dawn of a peaceful world where all peoples “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (*Is* 2:4).

All of us must work and commit ourselves to achieving a lasting peace, where the State of Palestine and the State of Israel can live side by side, breaking down the walls of enmity and hatred. We must all cherish Jerusalem so that it will become the city of fraternal encounter among Christians, Jews and Muslims, protected by a special internationally guaranteed status.

Brothers and sisters, we are here today in order to pray for peace. Let us ask God for this, as a gift of his mercy. Indeed, peace is not made only by written agreements or by human and political compromises. It is born from transformed hearts, and arises when each of us has encountered and been touched by God’s love, which dissolves our selfishness, shatters our prejudices and grants us the taste and joy of friendship, fraternity and mutual solidarity. There can be no peace if we do not let God himself first disarm our hearts, making them hospitable, compassionate and merciful. These are the attributes of God: hospitable closeness, compassion and mercy. God is near, compassionate and merciful.

This evening, then, we wish to renew our intercession, once again raising to God our prayer for peace, as we did ten years ago. We wish to ask the Lord to give continued growth to the olive tree we planted on that day, which has already become strong and flourishing because it has been sheltered from the wind and watered with care. Likewise, we must ask God that peace may spring forth in the heart of every person, in every people and nation, in every corner of the earth, protected from the winds of war and nourished by those who daily strive to live in fraternity.

May we not stop dreaming of peace, which gives us the unexpected joy of feeling part of the one human family. Several days ago, in Verona, I saw this joy on the faces of those two fathers, an Israeli and a Palestinian, who embraced each other in front of everyone. This is what Israel and Palestine need: an embrace of peace!

Let us ask the Lord that the leaders of nations and the parties in conflict may find the way to peace and unity. May we all recognize each other as brothers and sisters. Let us ask the Lord for this, and through the intercession of Mary, the young woman of Nazareth and Queen of Peace, let us repeat the prayer we made ten years ago:

Lord God of peace, hear our prayer! We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried… But our efforts have been in vain. Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: "Never again war!"; "With war everything is lost". Instil in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace. Amen.

Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, you created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace, our trepidation into confident trust, and our quarreling into forgiveness. Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words "division", "hatred" and "war" be banished from the heart of every man and woman.

Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be "brother", "sister", and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam! Amen.

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