



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL EDWARD CASSIDY
FOR THE 13th INTERNATIONAL MEETING
OF PEOPLE AND RELIGIONS**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*

I am particularly pleased, Your Eminence, to entrust to you the task of conveying my esteem and greetings to the distinguished representatives of the Christian Churches and Communities and of the great world religions who have gathered this year in Lisbon for the 13th International Meeting on the theme: "Oceans of Peace: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue".

My thoughts return to 1986, when for the first time men and women of different religions met on the hill of Assisi, marked by the witness of St Francis, to pray to God for peace. That event could not remain isolated. Indeed, it had an explosive spiritual force: it was like a spring from which new energies of peace began to flow. For this reason I hoped that the "spirit of Assisi" would not be extinguished, but could spread throughout the world and inspire new witnesses of peace and dialogue. Indeed, this world, marked by so many conflicts, misunderstandings and prejudices, has the utmost need for peace and dialogue.

I would therefore like to thank the Sant'Egidio Community in particular for the enthusiasm and spiritual courage with which it has received the message of Assisi and taken it to so many places in the world through their encounters with people of different religions. I remember the Bucharest Meeting in 1998, which had such strong echoes in Romania where, during my Apostolic Visit, I heard the cry repeated insistently by the people: "Unity! Unity!". Yes, dear Christian brothers and sisters, may unity remain a priority commitment for us. Let us look with hope at the century which has begun, because - as I wrote in *Ut unum sint!* - "the long history of Christians marked by many divisions seems to converge once more because it tends towards that Source of its unity which is Jesus Christ" (n. 22).

I am convinced that the "spirit of Assisi" is a providential gift for our time. In the diversity of religious expressions, honestly recognized as such, standing beside one another also visibly shows the human family's longing for unity. We must all walk towards this one goal. I remember when, as a young Bishop at the Second Vatican Council, I too signed the Declaration *Nostrae aetate*, which marked the beginning of a rich relationship between the Catholic Church, Judaism, Islam and other religions. That conciliar Declaration states that the Church, "[in] her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, ... reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them" (n. 1).

Interreligious dialogue must aim at this and work towards it. Today, by God's grace, this dialogue is no longer just a wish; it has become a reality, even if we still have a long way to go. How can we not thank the Lord for the gift of this reciprocal openness which is the prelude to deeper understanding between the Catholic Church and Judaism, precisely while I still have vivid memories of my unforgettable pilgrimage to the Holy Land? But significant results have also been achieved by the series of meetings with Islam, with Eastern religions and with the great cultures of the contemporary world. At the beginning of the new millennium, if we are to hasten this promising journey, we must not slacken our pace.

You know well that dialogue does not ignore real differences, but neither does it deny our common state as pilgrims bound for a new heaven and a new earth. Dialogue is also an invitation to strengthen that friendship which neither separates nor confuses. We must all be bolder on this journey, so that the men and women of our world, to whatever people or belief they belong, can discover that they are children of the one God and brothers and sisters to one another.

Today you are in Lisbon on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and your gaze turns to the people and cultures of the world. Lisbon is the first stage of your common journey in this new century.

Therefore I thank you, Patriarch José da Cruz Policarpo, for welcoming this pilgrimage with your entire Church. Through you, I greet my Brother Bishops and all the dear Portuguese people, whom I had the opportunity to meet on my recent pilgrimage to Fátima.

So many problems are looming on the world's horizon. However, humanity is in search of new stable forms of peace: "It is therefore necessary and urgent", as I wrote to the Meeting of People and Religions at Milan in 1993, "to find again the desire and determination to walk together to build a more united world, overcoming special interests of peoples, of ethnic groups and of nations.

What an important task religions can carry out in this regard! Poor in human means, they are rich in that universal aspiration which has its roots in a sincere relationship with God" (*Insegnamenti*, vol. XVII/2, 1993, 778).

As I entrust to you, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, my Message for the participants in the Lisbon

meeting, whom I cordially greet again, I invoke upon all present the blessings of almighty God. With his help, may the men and women of every people on the earth continue with renewed determination on the path of peace and mutual understanding!

From the Vatican, 21 September 2000.

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