



The Holy See

JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE HOLY LAND (MARCH 20-26, 2000)

SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

WELCOME CEREMONY IN ISRAEL

*Israel – Tel Aviv Airport
Tuesday, 21 March 2000*

*Dear President and Madame Weizman,
Dear Prime Minister and Madame Barak,
Dear Israeli Friends,
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1. Yesterday, from the heights of Mount Nebo I looked across the Jordan Valley to this blessed land. Today, it is with profound emotion that I set foot in the Land where God chose to “pitch his tent” (*Jn 1:14*; cf. *Ex 40:34-35*; *1 Kgs 8:10-13*), and made it possible for man to encounter him more directly.

In this year of the two thousandth anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, it has been my strong personal desire to come here and to pray in the most important places which, from ancient times, have seen God’s interventions, the wonders he has done. “You are the God who works wonders. You showed your power among the peoples” (*Ps 77:15*).

Mr President, I thank you for your warm welcome, and in your person I greet all the people of the State of Israel.

2. My visit is both a personal pilgrimage and the spiritual journey of the Bishop of Rome to the

origins of our faith in “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” (*Ex 3:15*). It is part of a larger pilgrimage of prayer and thanksgiving which led me first to Sinai, the Mountain of the Covenant, the place of the decisive revelation which shaped the subsequent history of salvation. Now I shall have the privilege of visiting some of the places more closely connected with the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Along every step of the way I am moved by a vivid sense of God who has gone before us and leads us on, who wants us to honour him in spirit and in truth, to acknowledge the differences between us, but also to recognize in every human being the image and likeness of the One Creator of heaven and earth.

3. Mr President, you are known as a man of peace and a peacemaker. We all know how urgent is the need for peace and justice, not for Israel alone but for the entire region. Many things have changed in relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel since my predecessor Pope Paul VI came here in 1964. The establishment of diplomatic relations between us in 1994 set a seal on efforts to open an era of dialogue on questions of common interest concerning religious freedom, relations between Church and State and, more generally, relations between Christians and Jews. On another level, world opinion follows with close attention the peace process which finds all the peoples of the region involved in the difficult search for a lasting peace with justice for all. With new-found openness towards one another, Christians and Jews together must make courageous efforts to remove all forms of prejudice. We must strive always and everywhere to present the true face of the Jews and of Judaism, as likewise of Christians and of Christianity, and this at every level of attitude, teaching and communication (cf. *Address to the Jewish Community of Rome*, 13 April 1986, 5).

4. My journey therefore is a pilgrimage, in a spirit of humble gratitude and hope, to the origins of our religious history. It is a tribute to the three religious traditions which co-exist in this land. For a long time I have looked forward to meeting the faithful of the Catholic communities in their rich variety, and the members of the various Christian Churches and Communities present in the Holy Land. I pray that my visit will serve to encourage an increase of interreligious dialogue that will lead Jews, Christians and Muslims to seek in their respective beliefs, and in the universal brotherhood that unites all the members of the human family, the motivation and the perseverance to work for the peace and justice which the peoples of the Holy Land do not yet have, and for which they yearn so deeply. The Psalmist reminds us that peace is God’s gift: “I will hear what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace, peace for his people and his friends, and those who turn to him in their hearts” (*Ps 85:8*). May peace be God’s gift to the Land he chose as his own!

Shalom.

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