



Francis visits the Great Synagogue of Rome

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Vatican City, 17 January 2016 (VIS) – Yesterday, following in the footsteps of St. John Paul II and Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, Pope Francis visited the Great Synagogue of Rome to greet the Jewish community of the capital, the longest-established in the world.

The Holy Father was received by the president of the Community of Rome, Ruth Dureghello, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Renzo Gattegna and the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni, who gave a welcome address.

"Toda rabba", (thank you), responded Francis, who then went on to speak about the importance that he has always attributed to the relationship between Jews and Christians ever since his days in Buenos Aires, when he met with the Argentine Jewish community and closely followed its celebrations and ceremonies. "In Jewish-Christian dialogue, there is a unique and special bond, by virtue of the Jewish roots of Christianity: Jews and Christians should consider themselves brothers, united by the same God and by a rich common spiritual heritage on which we base and continue to build the future". In this respect, he recalled that on 13 April 1986 St. John Paul II, during his visit to the same synagogue, coined the expression "elder brothers" to describe Jews in relation to Christians, and indeed, he affirmed "you are our elder brothers and sisters in faith. We all belong to the same family, the family of God, Who accompanies us and protects us as His people".

Francis noted that 2015 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the conciliar Declaration "Nostra aetate", which enabled systematic dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism, transforming the relationship between Christians and Jews. "From enemies and strangers, we have become friends and brothers. ... 'Yes' to the rediscovery of the Jewish roots of Christianity, 'no' to any form of anti-Semitism, and condemnation of every injustice, discrimination and persecution that may derive from it". The Pope also highlighted the theological dimension of this dialogue, affirming that "Christians, to understand themselves, cannot but refer to these Jewish roots, and the Church, while professing salvation through faith in Christ, acknowledges the irrevocable nature of the Old Covenant and God's constant, faithful love for Israel".

However, alongside the theological questions, the Pope also spoke about the challenges that today's world must face, beginning with that of the integral ecology that both Jews and Christians must respond to by offering "to humanity as a whole the Bible's message regarding care for creation. Conflicts, wars, violence and injustice open up deep wounds in humanity, and we are called upon to strengthen our commitment to peace and justice. Man's violence against man contradicts any religion worthy of the name, and in particular, the three great monotheistic religions. Life is sacred, as a gift from God. The fifth Commandment of the Decalogue says: 'Thou shalt not kill'. God is the God of life, and wishes always to promote it and defend it; and we, created in His image and semblance, are required to do likewise. Every human being, as a creature of God, is our brother, regardless of his origin or his religious belief. ... Neither violence nor death will have the final word before God, Who is the God of love and life. We must pray ceaselessly so that in Europe, the Holy Land, the Middle East, Africa and every other part of the world He may help us to practice the logic of peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and life".

The ceremony was also attended by the last Italian survivors of the Shoah, and the bishop of Rome spoke to them of how "the Jewish people, throughout their history, have suffered violence

and persecution, up to the extermination of European Jews during the Shoah. Six million people, just because they belonged to the Jewish people, were victims of the most inhuman barbarism perpetrated in the name of an ideology that sought to substitute man for God".

"On 16 October 1943, more than a thousand men, women and children of the Jewish community of Rome were deported to Auschwitz", he recalled. "Today I wish to remember them with the heart in a special way: their suffering, their anguish, their tears must never be forgotten. And the past must serve as a lesson for the present and for the future. The Shoah teaches us that it is necessary to maintain the highest vigilance, so as to intervene promptly in defence of human dignity and peace. I would like to express my closeness to every living witness of the Shoah, and I greet in particular those of you who are present here".

"In the last fifty years, mutual understanding and trust, and friendship, have grown and deepened between us", concluded the Holy Father. "Let us pray together to the Lord so that He might lead us on a path to a better future. God has plans for our salvation".

Pope Francis' address can be found here on this website:

Address of Pope Francis

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