



Interreligious Dialogue: A Duty for all Believers

30.06.2015 | Pope Francis

Address of the Holy Father during an ecumenical and interreligious meetin at the Franciscan International Study Centre, Sarajevo, 6 June 2015.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to take part in this meeting, which brings together representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina's religious confessions. I offer cordial greetings to each one of you and to your communities, and I thank each of those who offered the kind words and we have just heard. Your words have edified me.

Today's meeting is a sign of our shared desire for fraternity and peace; it is a testimony to the friendship and cooperation that has been developing over the years and which you already experience daily. To be present here today is already a "message" of that dialogue which everyone seeks and strives for.

I wish especially to recall one of the fruits of this desire for encounter and reconciliation, namely, the establishment in 1997 of a local Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which brings together Muslims, Christians and Jews. I am pleased by the work which this Council does to promote dialogue, coordinate common initiatives and develop relations with State Authorities. Your work in this region is immensely important, particularly in Sarajevo, which stands as the crossroads of peoples and cultures. Here, on the one hand, diversity constitutes a great resource which has contributed to the social, cultural and spiritual development of this region, while, on the other, it has also been the cause of painful rifts and bloody wars.

It is not by chance that the birth of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue and other valuable initiatives in the area of interreligious and ecumenical work came about at the end of the war, in response to the need for reconciliation and rebuilding a society torn apart by conflict. Interreligious dialogue here, as in every part of the world, is an indispensable condition for peace, and for this reason is a duty for all believers (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250).

Interreligious dialogue, before being a discussion of the main themes of faith, is a "conversation about human existence" (*ibid.*). This conversation shares the experiences of daily life in all its concreteness, with its joys and sufferings, its struggles and hopes; it takes on shared responsibilities; it plans a better future for all. We learn to live together, respecting each other's differences freely; we know and accept one another's identity. Through dialogue, a spirit of fraternity is recognized and developed, which unites and favours the promotion of moral values, justice, freedom and peace. Dialogue is a school of humanity and a builder of unity, which helps to build a society founded on tolerance and mutual respect.

For this reason, interreligious dialogue cannot be limited merely to the few, to leaders of religious communities, but must also extend as far as possible to all believers, engaging the different sectors of civil society. Particular attention must be paid to young men and women who are called to build the future of this country. It is always worth remembering, however, that for dialogue to be authentic and effective, it presupposes a solid identity: without an established identity, dialogue is of no use or even harmful. I say this with the young in mind, but it applies to everyone.

I sincerely appreciate all that you have managed to accomplish up to this point and I encourage each of you in your efforts for the cause of peace of which you, as religious leaders, are the first guardians here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I assure you that the Catholic Church will continue to offer her full support and willingness to help.

We are all aware that there is a long way yet to go. Let us not be discouraged, however, by the difficulties, but rather continue with perseverance along the way of forgiveness and reconciliation. While we seek to recall the past with honesty, thereby learning the lessons of history, we must also avoid lamentation and recrimination, letting ourselves instead be purified by God who gives us the present and the future: he is our future, he is the ultimate source of peace.

This city, which in the recent past sadly became a symbol of war and destruction, this Jerusalem of Europe, today, with its variety of peoples, cultures and religions, can become again a sign of unity, a place in which diversity does not represent a threat but rather a resource, an opportunity to grow together. In a world unfortunately rent by conflicts, this land can become a message: attesting that it is possible to live together side by side, in diversity but rooted in a common humanity, building together a future of peace and brotherhood. You can live life being a peacemaker!

I am grateful to you all for your presence and for the prayers which you will, of your goodness, offer for my ministry. For my part, I assure you that I will pray for you, for your communities, from my heart I will pray. May the Lord bless us all.

Now I invite you to say this prayer: to the Eternal, One and True Living God, to the Merciful God.

PRAYER

Almighty and eternal God,

good and merciful Father;

Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is visible and invisible;

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,

King and Lord of the past, of the present and of the future;

sole judge of every man and woman,

who reward your faithful with eternal glory!

We, the descendents of Abraham according to our faith in you, the one God,

Jews, Christians and Muslims,

humbly stand before you

and with trust we pray to you

for this country, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

that men and women, followers of different religions, nations and cultures

may live here in peace and harmony.

We pray to you, O Father,

that it may be so in every country of the world!

Strengthen in each of us faith and hope,

mutual respect and sincere love

for all of our brothers and sisters.

Grant that we may dedicate ourselves

courageously to building a just society,

to being men and women of good will,

filled with mutual understanding and forgiveness,

patient artisans of dialogue and peace.

May each of our thoughts, words and actions

be in harmony with your holy will.

May everything be to your glory and honour and for our salvation.

Praise and eternal glory to you, our God!

Amen.

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