



# Thirst for Peace: Faiths and Cultures in Dialogue

30.09.2016 | Pope Francis

**Address of the Holy Father on the occasion of his visit at Assisi's interfaith gathering, September 20, 2016**

Your Holinesses,

Distinguished Representatives of Churches, Christian Communities, and Religions,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you with great respect and affection, and I thank you for your presence here. I thank the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Diocese of Assisi and the Franciscan Families that have prepared this day of prayer. We have come to Assisi as pilgrims in search of peace. We carry within us and place before God the hopes and sorrows of many persons and peoples. We thirst for peace. We desire to witness to peace. And above all, we need to pray for peace, because peace is God's gift, and it lies with us to plead for it, embrace it, and build it every day with God's help.

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt 5:9). Many of you have travelled a great distance to reach this holy place. To set out, to come together in order to work for peace: these are not only physical movements, but most of all movements of the soul, concrete spiritual responses so as to overcome what is closed, and become open to God and to our brothers and sisters. God asks this of us, calling us to confront the great sickness of our time: indifference. It is a virus that paralyzes, rendering us lethargic and insensitive, a disease that eats away at the very heart of religious fervour, giving rise to a new and deeply sad paganism: *the paganism of indifference*.

We cannot remain indifferent. Today the world has a profound thirst for peace. In many countries, people are suffering due to wars which, though often forgotten, are always the cause of suffering and poverty. In Lesbos, with our beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, we saw the sorrow of war in the eyes of the refugees, the anguish of peoples thirsting for peace. I am thinking of the families, whose lives have been shattered; of the children who have known only violence in their lives; of the elderly, forced to leave their homeland. All of them have a great thirst for peace. We do not want these tragedies to be forgotten. Rather together we want to give voice to all those who suffer, to all those who have no voice and are not heard. They know well, often better than the powerful, that there is no tomorrow in war, and that the violence of weapons destroys the joy of life.

We do not have weapons. We believe, however, in the meek and humble strength of prayer. On this day, the thirst for peace has become a prayer to God, that wars, terrorism and violence may end. The peace which we invoke from Assisi is not simply a protest against war, nor is it “a result of negotiations, political compromises or economic bargaining. It is the result of prayer” (John Paul

II, [Address](#), Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, 27 October 1986: *Insegnamenti* IX,2 [1986], 1252). We seek in God, who is the source of communion, the clear waters of peace for which humanity thirsts: these waters do not flow from the deserts of pride and personal interests, from the dry earth of profit at any cost and the arms trade.

Our religious traditions are diverse. But our differences are not the cause of conflict and dispute, or a cold distance between us. We have not prayed against one another today, as has unfortunately sometimes occurred in history. Without syncretism or relativism, we have rather prayed side by side and for each other. In this very place Saint John Paul II said: “More perhaps than ever before in history, the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all” (Address, Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, 27 October 1986: *Insegnamenti* IX,2, 1268). Continuing the journey which began thirty years ago in Assisi, where the memory of that man of God and of peace who was Saint Francis remains alive, “once again, gathered here together, we declare that whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion’s deepest and truest inspiration” ([Address to the Representatives of the World Religions](#), Assisi, 24 January 2002: *Insegnamenti* XXV,1 [2002], 104). We further declare that violence in all its forms does not represent “the true nature of religion. It is the antithesis of religion and contributes to its destruction” (Benedict XVI, [Address at the Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World](#), Assisi, 27 October 2011: *Insegnamenti* VII,2 [2011], 512). We never tire of repeating that the name of God cannot be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!

Today we have pleaded for the holy gift of peace. We have prayed that consciences will be mobilized to defend the sacredness of human life, to promote peace between peoples and to care for creation, our common home. Prayer and concrete acts of cooperation help us to break free from the logic of conflict and to reject the rebellious attitudes of those who know only how to protest and be angry. Prayer and the desire to work together commit us to a true peace that is not illusory: not the calm of one who avoids difficulties and turns away, if his personal interests are not at risk; it is not the cynicism of one who washes his hands of any problem that is not his; it is not the virtual approach of one who judges everything and everyone using a computer keyboard, without opening his eyes to the needs of his brothers and sisters, and dirtying his hands for those in need. Our path leads us to immersing ourselves in situations and giving first place to those who suffer; to taking on conflicts and healing them from within; to following ways of goodness with consistency, rejecting the shortcuts offered by evil; to patiently engaging processes of peace, in good will and with God’s help.

Peace, a thread of hope that unites earth to heaven, a word so simple and difficult at the same time. Peace means *Forgiveness*, the fruit of conversion and prayer, that is born from within and that, in God’s name, makes it possible to heal old wounds. Peace means *Welcome*, openness to dialogue, the overcoming of closed-mindedness, which is not a strategy for safety, but rather a bridge over an empty space. Peace means *Cooperation*, a concrete and active exchange with another, who is a gift and not a problem, a brother or sister with whom to build a better world. Peace denotes *Education*, a call to learn every day the challenging art of communion, to acquire a culture of encounter, purifying the conscience of every temptation to violence and stubbornness which are contrary to the name of God and human dignity.

We who are here together and in peace believe and hope in a fraternal world. We desire that men and women of different religions may everywhere gather and promote harmony, especially where there is conflict. Our future consists in living together. For this reason we are called to free ourselves from the heavy burdens of distrust, fundamentalism and hate. Believers should be *artisans of peace* in their prayers to God and in their actions for humanity! As religious leaders, we are duty bound to be strong bridges of dialogue, creative mediators of peace. We turn to those who hold the greatest responsibility in the service of peoples, to the leaders of nations, so that they may not tire of seeking and promoting ways of peace, looking beyond self-serving interests and those of

the moment: may they not remain deaf to God's appeal to their consciences, to the cry of the poor for peace and to the healthy expectations of younger generations. Here, thirty years ago, Pope John Paul II said: "Peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists. Peace is a universal responsibility (*Address, Lower Piazza of the Basilica of Saint Francis, 27 October 1986: l.c., 1269*). Sisters and brothers, let us assume this responsibility, reaffirming today our "yes" to being, together, builders of the peace that God wishes for us and for which humanity thirsts.

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