



## Your sufferings are our sufferings

01.10.2021 | Pope Francis

**Address of His Holiness at a meeting with the Jewish community of Slovakia, Bratislava, Rybné námestie Square, Monday, 13 September 2021.**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Good evening! I thank you for your kind words of welcome and for the testimonies you have offered. I have come as a pilgrim, to visit this place and be moved by it. This Square is a highly meaningful place for your community. It keeps alive the memory of a rich history. For centuries it was part of the Jewish quarter. Here the celebrated rabbi Chatam Sofer laboured. Here a synagogue stood alongside the Cathedral of the Coronation. The architectural setting, as we heard, was an expression of the peaceful coexistence of the two communities, an unusual and evocative symbol, and a striking sign of unity in the name of the God of our fathers. Here, like so many of them, I too feel the desire to “remove my sandals” in a place blessed by human fraternity in the name of the Most High.

In later times, however, God’s name was dishonoured: in a frenzy of hatred, during the Second World War more than a hundred thousand Slovak Jews were killed. In an effort to eradicate every trace of the community, the synagogue was demolished. It is written: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Ex 20:7). The divine Name, the Lord himself, is blasphemed whenever the unique and distinctive dignity of the human person, created in his image, is violated. Here, in this place, the Name of God was dishonoured, for the worst form of blasphemy is to exploit it for our own purposes, refusing to respect and love others. Here, reflecting on the history of the Jewish people marked by this tragic affront to the Most High, we admit with shame how often his ineffable Name has been used for unspeakable acts of inhumanity! How many oppressors have said: “God is with us”; yet it was they, who were not with God!

Dear brothers and sisters, your history is our history, your sufferings are our sufferings. For some of you, this Memorial of the Shoah is the only place where you can honour the memory of your loved ones. I join with you in this. The word “*zechor*” – “Remember!” – is inscribed in Hebrew on this Memorial. Memory cannot and must not give way to forgetfulness, for there will be no lasting dawn of fraternity unless we have first shared and dispelled the darkness of the night. For us too, the prophet’s question echoes: “Watchman, what of the night?” (*Is* 21:11). Now is the time when the image of God shining forth in humanity must not be obscured. Let us help one another in this effort. For in our day too, so many empty and false idols dishonour the Name of the Most High: the idols of power and money that prevail over human dignity; a spirit of indifference that looks the other way; and forms of manipulation that would exploit religion in the service of power or else reduce it to irrelevance. But also forgetfulness of the past, ignorance prepared to justify anything, anger and hatred. I repeat: let us unite in condemning all violence and every form of anti-Semitism, and in working to ensure that God’s image, present in the humanity he created, will never be profaned.

This Square, dear brothers and sisters, is also a place where the light of hope shines forth. Each year you come here during Hanukkah to light the first lamp on the menorah. Darkness is dispelled by the message that destruction and death do not have the last word, but rather renewal and life. Though the synagogue on this site was torn down, the community remains present. A community

alive and open to dialogue. In this place, our histories meet once more. Here let us affirm together before God our willingness to persevere on the path of rapprochement and friendship.

I have vivid memories of my 2017 meeting in Rome with representatives of your Jewish and Christian communities. I am pleased to say that afterwards a Commission for dialogue with the Catholic Church was established and that together you have published several significant documents. It is good to share and make known the things that unite us. And it is good to advance, in truth and honesty, along the fraternal path of a purification of memory, to heal past wounds and to remember the good received and offered. According to the *Talmud*, whoever destroys a single individual destroys the whole world, while whoever saves a single individual saves the whole world. Every individual matters, and what you are doing through your important exchanges matters greatly. I thank you for the doors you have opened on both sides.

Our world needs open doors. They are signs of blessing for humanity. God said to Father Abraham: “By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (*Gen* 12:3). This is a recurring theme throughout the lives of the Patriarchs (cf. *Gen* 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). To Jacob, Israel, God said: “Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves” (*Gen* 28:14). Here in this land of Slovakia, a land of encounter between east and west, north and south, may the family of the children of Israel continue to foster this vocation, the summons to be a sign of blessing for all the families of the earth. The blessing of the Most High is poured out upon us, whenever he sees a family of brothers and sisters who respect and love each other and work together. May the Almighty bless you, so that, amid all the discord that defiles our world, you may always be, together, witnesses of peace. *Shalom!*

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