

## **64. To the Faithful in General Audience**

*Rome, October 22, 1986*

### **1. Assisi: All Together to Implore God for Peace**

As is known, next Monday, October 27, I shall be in Assisi together with numerous representatives of other churches and Christian communities and of the other world religions for the purpose of praying for peace.

Undoubtedly, it is an outstanding event of a religious character, exclusively religious. Thus it was planned, and it will take place in this perspective with the collaboration of all participants. It will be a day of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. I trust that, by the Lord's grace, it will really be a high point of that "movement of prayer and peace" that I hoped for on the threshold of 1986, proclaimed by the United Nations as the "International Year of Peace."

At Assisi, all the representatives of the Christian churches and communities and of the world religions will be engaged solely in invoking from God the great gift of peace.

I would like this fact, so important for the process of reconciliation of men among themselves and with God, to be seen and interpreted by all members of the Church in the light of the Second Vatican Council and of its teaching. In the Council, the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reflected at length on her position in a world ever more marked by the encounter of cultures and religions. According to the Council, the Church is ever more aware of her mission and duty, indeed of her essential vocation to announce to the world the true salvation which is found only in Jesus Christ, God and man (cf. AG 1-3).

Yes, only in Christ can all mankind be saved. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). From the very beginning of history all who are truly faithful to God's call, as far as it is known to them, have been directed toward Christ (cf. LG16).

### **2. Discover "the Rays of the One Truth"**

Conscious of the common vocation of humanity and of the unique plan of salvation, the Church feels herself linked to one and all, as Christ "is united in a certain way with everyone" (GS 22). To one and all she proclaims that Christ is the center of the created world and of history.

Precisely because Christ is the center of the whole created world and of history, and because "no one can come to the Father except through him" (Jn 14:6), we approach other religions in an attitude of sincere respect and of fervent witness to Christ in whom we believe. In them there are the "seeds of the Word," the "rays of the one truth," to quote the words of the early Fathers of the Church who lived and worked in the midst of paganism, and to which the Second Vatican Council refers both in the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (cf. NA 2), and in the Decree *Ad Gentes* (cf. AG 11, 18). We know what we believe to be the limits of these religions, but that does not at all take away from the fact that they possess even outstanding religious values and qualities (cf. NA 2).

### **3. Present at the Prayer of Others**

These are precisely the "traces" or the "seeds" of the Word and the "rays" of the truth. Among these there is undoubtedly prayer, often accompanied by fasting, by other penances and by pilgrimage to sacred places held in great veneration. We respect this prayer even though we do not intend to make our own those formulas that express other views of faith. Nor would the others, on their part, wish to adopt our prayers.

What will take place at Assisi will certainly not be religious syncretism but a sincere attitude of prayer to God in an atmosphere of mutual respect. For this reason the formula chosen for the gathering at Assisi is: Being together in order to pray. Certainly we cannot "pray together," namely, to make a common prayer, but we can be present while others pray. In this way we manifest our respect for the prayer of others and for the attitude of others before the divinity; at the same time, we offer them the humble and sincere witness of our faith in Christ, Lord of the universe.

This is what will happen at Assisi where, at one time during the day, the separate prayers of the different religious representatives will be held in various places. Then, later, in the Piazzale of the lower basilica of St. Francis, there will follow, in succession, appropriately distinct, the prayer of the representatives of each religion, while all the others will be present at Assisi with the respectful attitude, both interior and exterior, of one who is a witness of the supreme effort of other men and women to seek God.

### **4. Construct Peace Together**

This "being together to pray" takes on a particularly profound and eloquent

significance inasmuch as they will be standing side by side to implore from God the gift of peace—the gift of which all humanity has so much need today for survival.

It is my profound awareness of the necessity of this gift for all, of its urgency and of the fact that it depends solely on God, that moved me to address the other Christian churches and the great world religions, who share the same concern for the fate of mankind and who manifest the same readiness to pledge themselves to seek peace through prayer.

The world religions, notwithstanding the fundamental differences that separate them, are all called to make (hair contribution to the birth of a world which is more human, more just and more fraternal. After having been frequently the cause of division, all would now like to play a decisive role in the building of world peace. This we wish to do together. As my predecessor Paul VI said in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*: "...with them we wish to promote and defend the ideals which we can have in common in the field of religious liberty, human brotherhood, culture and learning, social works of charity and civil order" (ES 12).

It is in this spirit that I invited the churches and religions to come to Assisi. It is in the same spirit that the invitation has been accepted. Everywhere the particular churches, in their turn, have associated themselves with this initiative, frequently together with other Christian churches and with representatives of other religions. Thus there is realized and extended that great "movement of prayer for peace" that I spoke of on January 25 this year.

The 27th of October will therefore be a day wholly devoted to prayer. This is its characteristic, since "prayer, which expresses in various ways man's relationship with the living God, is also the first task and almost the first announcement of the Pope, just as it is the first condition of his service in the Church and in the world."

Prayer is the breath of the soul. Every adorer of the living and true God believes in the limitless value of prayer and feels welling up from his inmost being the need to pray.

### **5. In the Footsteps of St. Francis**

At Assisi, we shall be welcomed by the poor and humble Brother Francis. He will welcome us with the ardent and illuminating energy of his seraphic personality, by reason of which he has been likened to the sun, and his native land to a new East. He will welcome us with the irresistible charm of his unarmed, and peace-making simplicity, which is capable of reaching the most secret parts of every heart. He will

welcome us with the tender and sublime accents of his Canticle, which alternate the strophes of created reality with the highest summit attainable by those who pray, when prayer becomes life and life becomes prayer: "Praised be you, my Lord."

From the mystic hill, the Franciscan greeting *Pax et Bonum* will again wend its way through the pathways of the world in the steps of new witness, to bring the conviction that peace is necessary, is possible, is a duty, and to prove that it alone can guarantee humanity of the second millennium a serene and industrious future.

I ask you to pray earnestly for these great intentions. If from all human hearts there arises to the one God the yearning for peace and universal brotherhood, fused as it were into one great prayer, then there is no doubt but that he will hear us: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Lk 11:9).