



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 28 May 2014

Video

The pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

As you know, in the past days I made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was a great gift for the Church, and I thank God for it. He led me through that blessed Land, which saw the historical presence of Jesus and where fundamental events for Judaism, Christianity and Islam took place. I wish to renew my heartfelt appreciation to His Beatitude, Patriarch Fouad Twal, to the Bishops of the various Rites, to the Priests, and to the Franciscans of the Custos of the Holy Land. These Franciscans are good! Their work and what they do is very beautiful! My thoughts turn in gratitude also to the Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian authorities, who welcomed me with such courtesy, I would even say friendship, as well as all those who collaborated in making the visit a reality.

1. The main purpose of this pilgrimage was to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic *meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras*. That was the first time a Successor of Peter had visited the Holy Land: thus Paul VI inaugurated, during the Second Vatican Council, papal journeys outside Italy in the modern age. That prophetic gesture of the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople was a milestone along the painful yet promising path to Christian unity, which since then has made significant steps forward. Therefore my meeting with His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, our beloved brother in Christ, represented the culminating moment of the visit. Together we prayed at the Sepulchre of Jesus, and with us were the Greek

Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III and the Apostolic Armenian Patriarch Nourhan, as well as Archbishops and Bishops of various Churches and Communities, civil Authorities and many faithful. In that place where the announcement of the Resurrection resounded, we felt all the bitterness and pain of the divisions which still exist among Christ's disciples; and truly this does great harm, harm to the heart. We are still divided; in that place where the very announcement of the Resurrection resounded, where Jesus gave us life, we are still somewhat divided. But above all, in that celebration filled with mutual brotherhood, esteem and affection, we heard loudly the voice of the Risen Good Shepherd who desires to make all of his sheep one single flock; we felt the desire to heal the wounds that are still open and to continue with tenacity on the journey to full communion. Once more, as former Popes have done, I ask forgiveness for what we have done to foster this division, and I ask the Holy Spirit to help us heal the wounds we have inflicted on other brothers. We are all brothers in Christ and with Patriarch Bartholomew we are friends, brothers, and we have shared the desire to walk together, to do all that we can do from this day forward: pray together, work together for God's flock, seek peace, take care of creation, the many things that we have in common. And as brothers we move forward.

2. Another purpose of this pilgrimage was to encourage in that region *the path to peace*, which is God's gift and, at the same time, the task of men. I did it in Jordan, in Palestine and in Israel. And I did it always as a pilgrim, in the name of God and of mankind, bearing in my heart a great compassion for the children of that Land who for too long have lived amid war and who have the right finally to know days of peace!

Therefore I exhorted the Christian faithful to allow themselves, with open and docile hearts, to be "anointed" by the Holy Spirit, so as to be increasingly capable of acts of humility, fraternity and reconciliation. The Spirit allows one to adopt these attitudes in daily life, with people of various cultures and religions, and thus to become "craftsmen" of peace. Peace is crafted by hand! There are no industries for peace, no. It is fashioned each day, by hand, and also with an open heart so that the gift of God may come. That is why I exhorted the Christian faithful to allow themselves to be "anointed".

In Jordan I thanked the Authorities and the people for their efforts in welcoming the many refugees from war torn areas, a humanitarian effort that deserves and requires the constant support of the international Community. I was struck by the generosity of the Jordanian people in welcoming refugees, the many who flee from war in that area. May the Lord bless this welcoming people, may he greatly bless them! And we must pray that the Lord bless this hospitality and ask all international institutions to help them in this work of hospitality that they are carrying out. During the pilgrimage to other places, too, I encouraged the respective authorities to continue in their efforts to ease tensions in the Middle East, especially in martyred Syria, and to continue to seek a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, I invited the President of Israel and the President of Palestine, both men of peace and peacemakers, to come to the Vatican to pray together with me for peace. And please, I ask you not to leave us alone: pray, pray much that the

Lord may give us peace, that He may give us peace in that blessed Land! I am counting on your prayers. Be strong in prayer at this time, pray intently that peace may come.

3. This pilgrimage to the Holy Land was also the occasion *to confirm in faith the Christian communities*, who suffer so much, and to express the gratitude of the entire Church for the presence of Christians in that region and in the entire Middle East. These, our brothers and sisters, are courageous witnesses of hope and charity, “salt and light” in that Land. By their lives of faith and prayer, and through their appreciated charitable and educational works, they work on behalf of reconciliation and forgiveness, thereby contributing to the common good of society.

On this pilgrimage, which was a true grace of the Lord, I wished to bring a word of hope, but I also received one in return! I received it from so many brothers and sisters who hope “against all hope” (Rom 4:18), amid such suffering, like those of one who has fled his own country because of the conflicts; like those of all who, in various parts of the world, are discriminated against and scorned on account of their faith in Christ. Let us continue to stay close to them! Let us pray for them and for peace in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East. May the prayer of the whole Church also support the journey to full Christian unity, so that the world may believe in the love of God who in Jesus Christ came to dwell among us.

And I invite everyone now to pray together, to pray together to Our Lady, Queen of Peace, Queen of Christian unity, the *Mamma* of all Christians: that she may give peace to us, to the whole world, and that she may accompany us on this path of unity. [*Ave Maria*]

Greetings:

I am pleased to greet the members of the International Catholic Migration Commission meeting in plenary session, with prayerful good wishes for their united action in providing relief to so many of our brothers and sisters in need. I also greet the Catholic Police Guild of England and Wales on the centenary of its foundation, and the members of the Global Legislators Organization. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in today’s Audience, including those from England, Sweden, Israel, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, South Africa, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord. God bless you!

I especially turn my thoughts to the *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. We are about to conclude the Marian month. May the Mother of God, dear *young people*, be your refuge in the most difficult moments; may she sustain you, dear *sick people*, in courageously confronting your daily cross; and may she be your point of reference, dear *newlyweds*, so that your family may be a domestic hearth of prayer and mutual understanding. Thank you.

