



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Meeting organized by the Sant'Egidio Community: "The cry of peace. Religions and Cultures in dialogue", in the presence of the Holy Father Francis (23 to 25 October 2022)

This afternoon, in the Colosseum in Rome, the international meeting organized by the Sant'Egidio Community in the "Spirit of Assisi" on the theme "The cry of peace. Religions and Cultures in dialogue", taking place from 23 to 25 October.

At 16.30 the Holy Father Francis presided over the prayer of Christians together with representatives of other religions. At the end, the Pope took to the stage along with other representatives for the international meeting and the beginning of the ceremony, at the end of which the Appeal for Peace was read.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father Francis to the participants at the meeting, and the text of the Appeal for Peace:

Address of the Holy Father

Distinguished Leaders of the Christian Churches and of World Religions,

Brothers and Sisters,

Honourable Civil Authorities,

I thank each of you who are taking part in this meeting of prayer for peace. In a special way, I thank the Christian leaders and those of other religions, who have joined us in the same spirit of fraternity that inspired the first historic convocation willed by Saint John Paul II in Assisi, thirty-six years ago.

This year our prayer has become a *heartfelt plea*, because today peace has been gravely violated, assaulted and trampled upon, and this in Europe, on the very continent that in the last century endured the horrors of two

world wars – and we are experiencing a third. Sadly, since then, wars have continued to cause bloodshed and to impoverish the earth. Yet the situation that we are presently experiencing is particularly dramatic. That is why we have raised our prayer to God, who always hears the anguished plea of his sons and daughters. Hear us, Lord!

Peace is at the heart of the religions, their sacred writings and their teaching. This evening, amid the silence of prayer, we have heard that plea for peace: a peace suppressed in so many areas of the world, violated by all too many acts of violence, and denied even to children and the elderly, who have not been spared the bitter sufferings of war. That plea for peace is often stifled, not only by hostile rhetoric but also by indifference. It is reduced to silence by hatred, which spreads as the fighting continues.

Yet the plea for peace cannot be suppressed: it rises from the hearts of mothers; it is deeply etched on the faces of refugees, displaced families, the wounded and the dying. And this silent plea rises up to heaven. It has no magic formulas for ending conflict, but it does have the sacred right to implore peace in the name of all those who suffer, and it deserves to be heard. It rightfully summons everyone, beginning with government leaders, to take time and listen, seriously and respectfully. That plea for peace expresses the pain and the horror of war, which is the mother of all poverty.

“Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261). These convictions are the fruit of the painful lessons of the twentieth century, and sadly, once more, this part of the twenty-first. Today, in fact, something we dreaded and hoped never to hear of again is threatened outright: the use of atomic weapons, which even after Hiroshima and Nagasaki continued wrongly to be produced and tested.

In this bleak scenario, where, sad to say, the plans of potent world leaders make no allowance for the just aspirations of peoples, God’s plan for our salvation, which is “a plan for peace and not for evil” (cf. *Jer* 29:11), never changes. Here the voice of the voiceless finds a hearing; here the hope of the poor and the powerless is firmly established: in God, whose name is Peace. Peace is God’s gift, and we have implored that gift from him. Yet peace must be embraced and nurtured by us men and women, especially by those of us who are believers. Let us not be infected by the perverse rationale of war; let us not fall into the trap of hatred for the enemy. Let us once more put peace at the heart of our vision for the future, as the primary goal of our personal, social and political activity at every level. Let us defuse conflicts by the weapon of dialogue.

In October 1962, amid a grave international crisis, when military confrontation and nuclear holocaust seemed imminent, Saint John XXIII made this appeal: “We plead with all government leaders not to remain deaf to this cry of humanity. Let them do everything in their power to safeguard peace. They will thus spare the world the horrors of a war, the terrible consequences of which cannot be foreseen... Promoting, fostering, and accepting dialogue at all levels and in all times is a rule of wisdom and prudence that attracts the blessing of heaven and earth” (*Radio Message*, 25 October 1962).

Sixty years later, these words still impress us by their timeliness. I make them my own. We are not “neutral, but allied for peace”, and for that reason “we invoke the *ius pacis* as the right of all to settle conflicts without violence” (*Meeting with Students and Representatives of the Academic World*, Bologna, 1 October 2017).

In recent years, fraternal relations between religions have taken decisive steps forward: “Sister religions to help peoples be brothers and sisters living in peace” (*Meeting of Religions for Peace*, October 7, 2021). More and more, we feel that we are all brothers and sisters! A year ago, gathered here before the Colosseum, we launched an appeal that is all the more timely today: “Religions cannot be used for war. Only peace is holy and no one is to use the name of God to bless terror and violence. If you see wars around you, do not resign yourselves! The peoples desire peace” (*ibid.*).

This is what we will strive to do ever better each day. Let us never grow resigned to war; let us cultivate seeds of reconciliation. Today let us raise to heaven our plea for peace, again in the words of Saint John XXIII: “May all peoples come together as brothers and sisters, and may the peace they so deeply desire ever flourish and reign in their midst” (*Pacem in Terris*, 171). So be it, with God’s grace and the good will of the men and women whom

he loves.

Appeal for Peace

Gathered in Rome in the spirit of Assisi, we have prayed for peace, according to various traditions but in agreement. Now we, representatives of the Christian Churches and world Religions, turn thoughtfully to the world and to the leaders of States. We make ourselves the voice of those who suffer as a result of war, refugees, and the families of all the victims and the fallen.

With firm conviction we say: no more war! Let us stop all conflict. War brings only death and destruction; it is an endeavour with no return in which we are all losers. Let the guns be silent, declare a universal ceasefire immediately. Let negotiations capable of leading to just solutions for a stable and lasting peace be activated soon, before it is too late. Let dialogue be resumed to nullify the threat of nuclear weapons.

After the horrors and pain of the Second World War, the nations were able to mend the deep wounds of the conflict and, through multilateral dialogue, to give birth to the United Nations Organization, the fruit of an aspiration that, today more than ever, is a necessity: peace. We must not now lose sight of what a tragedy war is, generating death and poverty.

We are at a crossroads: to be the generation that lets the planet and humanity die, that accumulates and trades in weapons, under the illusion of saving ourselves against others; or instead the generation that creates new ways of living together, does not invest in weapons, abolishes war as a means of conflict resolution and stops the abnormal exploitation of the planet's resources.

We believers must work for peace in every way we can. It is our duty to help disarm hearts and call for reconciliation between peoples. Unfortunately, even among ourselves, we have sometimes divided ourselves by abusing the holy name of God: we ask for forgiveness, with humility and shame. Religions are, and must continue to be, a great resource for peace. Peace is holy, war can never be!

Humanity must put an end to wars, or a war will put an end to humanity. The world, our common home, is unique and does not belong to us, but to future generations. Therefore, let us rid it of the nuclear nightmare. Let us immediately reopen a serious dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation and the disposal of atomic weapons.

Let us start again together with dialogue, which is an effective medicine for the reconciliation of peoples. Let us invest in every avenue of dialogue. Peace is always possible! No more war! Never again must we be against each other!
