



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL REINHARD MARX
ARCHBISHOP OF MUNICH AND FREISING
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING
OF PRAYER FOR PEACE "BOUND TO LIVE TOGETHER":
RELIGIONS AND CULTURES IN DIALOGUE
ORGANIZED BY THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO
[MUNICH, 11 - 13 SEPTEMBER 2011]**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Reinhard Marx,
Archbishop of Munich and Freising*

In a few weeks we will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Blessed John Paul II's invitation to representatives of the world's different religions to gather in Assisi for an international meeting to pray for peace. Starting from that memorable event, year after year the Community of Sant'Egidio has organized a meeting for peace in order to deepen the spirit of peace and reconciliation so that God, through prayer, will make us people of peace.

I am glad that this year's meeting is taking place in Munich, where I was bishop, on the eve of my journey to Germany and in preparation for the ceremony to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the World Prayer for Peace in Assisi that will be celebrated next October. I willingly assure the organizers and participants in the Munich meeting of my spiritual closeness and I warmly address to all my good wishes that it will be blessed.

The theme of the meeting for peace, "Bound to Live Together" reminds us that we human beings are bound to each other. This social dimension is basically a simple aptitude that derives directly from our human condition. It is therefore our task to give it a positive slant. Living together can turn into living in antagonism, it can become hell if we do not learn to accept each other and if no one

wants to be anything other than himself.

However, opening oneself to others and offering oneself to others can also be a gift. Thus everything depends on viewing the propensity for living together as a commitment and a gift and on finding the true way to coexist. Today this coexistence, which could once be restricted to a single region, cannot but be lived at a universal level. Today, the subject of coexistence is the whole of humanity. Meetings such as the one held in Assisi and the one being held in Munich at this time are opportunities in which religions can question themselves and ask themselves how to promote peaceful coexistence.

When we gather as Christians, let us remember that for biblical faith God is the creator of all human beings; indeed, God wants us to form one family in which we are all brothers and sisters. Let us remember that Christ proclaimed peace to those near and far (Eph 2:16 ff). We must never cease to learn it. The fundamental meaning of these encounters is that we should address those near and far in the same spirit of peace that Christ showed us. We must learn to live with each other rather than beside each other, namely, we must learn to open our hearts to others, to enable others to share in our joys, hopes and anxieties.

The heart is the place in which the Lord makes himself close to us. This is why religion, which is focused on the encounter of the human being with the divine mystery, is essentially linked to the question of peace. If religion fails to bring about the encounter with God, if it brings God down to our level instead of raising us up to him, if in a certain sense it makes him our property, then in that way it can contribute to the disintegration of peace. If instead it leads to the divine, to the Creator and Redeemer of all human beings, then it becomes a force for peace.

We know that in Christianity too there have been real distortions of the image of God that have led to the disruption of peace which is all the more reason to allow the divine God to purify us, to become people of peace. We must never fail in our joint effort for peace. This is why the many initiatives across the world, such as Sant'Egidio's annual prayer meeting for peace, and other similar projects are so valuable. The field in which the fruit of peace should flourish must always be cultivated. We are often unable to do anything more than ceaselessly prepare the ground for peace, within us and around us, taking many small steps, mindful of the great challenges that humanity as a whole — not the individual — must reckon with, such as migration, globalization, economic crises and the safeguard of creation.

Yet ultimately we know that peace is not simply "achieved" but is always also "given". "Peace is a gift of God and at the same time a task which is never fully completed" (*Message for World Day of Peace 2011*, n. 15). For this very reason it is necessary for the common witness of all who seek God with a pure heart, to achieve increasingly the idea of peaceful coexistence among all human beings. Since the first Meeting in Assisi 25 years ago, there have been turning points and many projects are being put into practice for reconciliation and peace which fill us with hope.

Unfortunately, however, there have also been many opportunities missed and many steps back. Terrible acts of violence and terrorism have repeatedly suffocated the hope of a peaceful coexistence of the human family at the dawn of the third millennium. Some old conflicts smoulder under the ashes or flare up anew, and in addition there are new clashes and new problems.

All this clearly shows us that peace is a permanent mandate entrusted to us and at the same time a gift to be invoked. In this regard, may the meeting for peace in Munich and the colloquiums that have taken place there, contribute to promoting mutual understanding and coexistence, thereby paving an ever new way to peace in our time! For this I invoke upon all who are taking part in this year's meeting for peace in Munich the blessing of Almighty God.

From Castel Gandolfo, 1 September 2011

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