



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 16 April 1997*

1. *Sanctus Deus, Sanctus fortis, Sanctus immortalis — miserere nobis.*

*“Holy God, holy and powerful, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.*

*From pestilence, hunger and war, deliver us, Lord.*

*From sudden death, deliver us Lord.*

*Sinners, we implore you, hear us, Lord.*

*Jesus, forgive us. Jesus hear us. Jesus have mercy on us.*

*Mother, beseech. Mother, implore. Mother, intercede for us.*

*All you saints of God, intercede for us”.*

These invocations, dear to the Christian people, accompanied me during my journey to Sarajevo, my stay in that city and my meeting with the Christian community living there. The words “*symbolic city*” recurred several times. In fact, Sarajevo is the symbol of the European crises. From there the First World War broke out in 1914 and, towards the end of the century, Sarajevo once again has become the symbol of the tragic and senseless war that divided the Southern Slavs, the former Yugoslav nations, causing huge numbers of human victims. That is why Sarajevo has become the city of cemeteries. Next to the stadium where I was able to preside at the Eucharistic celebration on Sunday, 13 April, cemeteries can be clearly seen with the still fresh graves of the victims of the recent conflict. How can we forget that in recent years, almost every day we have been shown heart-rending pictures of mothers or young people kneeling at the graves of their husbands, fathers or fiancés? That is why I wanted forcefully to repeat in Sarajevo what Paul VI said many times, and I myself had stressed in my Message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations: “*No more war! Never again!*” (*Insegnamenti XVI/1*, 1993, 564; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 17 March 1993, p. 1).

*“From pestilence, hunger and war, deliver us, Lord”.*

2. The idea of visiting Sarajevo came to mind several years ago, when warfare was rapidly spreading in that region. I longed to go to that city and I did everything in my power to do so. But since every effort was in vain, I repeatedly organized *meetings of prayer* and petition in Rome, Castel Gandolfo and Assisi, invoking peace for those tormented lands. I wanted such fervent prayers to show our brothers and sisters in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Christians or Muslims, Croats or Serbs — that they were not alone: that *we were with them* and that we would continue to be with them until peace returned to their country. The inhabitants of Sarajevo remembered all this and several times during my visit they told me so. They knew that the Church, not only in Europe but throughout the world, was with them; *they knew that they had not been abandoned*. And this certainly gave them moral support.

The Church’s persevering solidarity was also shown in the elevation of my venerable Brother Vinko Puljić, Archbishop of Sarajevo, to the rank of Cardinal in the Consistory of 1994.

During the visit I wanted to stress this ecclesial communion by also meeting the other Bishops of Bosnia-Herzegovina: Bishop Franjo Komarica of Banja Luka, and Bishop Ratko Perić of Mostar-Duvno.

Pilgrimages of the faithful to the Marian shrines in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in many other parts of the world, especially in Loreto, continued throughout the war to ask the Mother of nations and the Queen of peace to intercede so that peace would be restored to that tormented region.

*“Mother, beseech! Mother, implore! Mother, intercede for us! All you saints of God, intercede for us!”*

3. My entire Pastoral Visit to Sarajevo was marked precisely by this incessant prayer for peace, from Saturday evening to Sunday afternoon, 12-13 April. Every stage of the programme intended to emphasize one principal message: *hope*. From my arrival at the airport to the meeting in the cathedral of Sarajevo with the Bishops, clergy and religious, to the highlight of the visit, which was the Mass concelebrated with the Cardinals, Bishops and priests of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the other States of the former Yugoslavia, and of many countries in Europe and the world, I wanted to bring words of hope to the inhabitants of the city and of the entire country. After the painful experience of the war, which caused injustices and has left revenge and hatred in its wake, hope takes the concrete form of *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. I urged all the ethnic and religious communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina, profoundly marked by suffering, to *forgive* and *be reconciled*, and I have prayed that they will be able to say to one another: *“We forgive and we ask for forgiveness”*. Reconciliation and dialogue is the only way to lasting peace.

At the meeting with the clergy I could not refrain from mentioning the particular merits of the

Franciscan Order in the evangelization of that country, especially under Ottoman rule, and at the same time I urged all diocesan clergy and religious to work together in solidarity under the guidance of their own Bishops. In my homilies and speeches I wanted to thank those who have supported me in various ways and continue to support the suffering peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nor did I neglect to appeal to the political, economic and military authorities of Europe not to forget the urgent needs of that country, so tried by the war.

During Mass in the stadium of Sarajevo, the Liturgy of the Word for the Third Sunday of Easter presented to us Christ, our advocate before God. Sarajevo, Christ is your advocate in a very special way! He is your advocate, all you nations that once belonged to the Yugoslav Federation. He is your advocate, dear European continent; he is your advocate, peoples of the earth!

Peace, which is born of reconciliation and forgiveness, is the essential concern of every believer. This spirit of unity, forgiveness and reconciliation in the light of faith gave a special eloquence to the meetings I had with the representatives of the Orthodox Church and of the Muslim and Jewish communities. *I wished to award the Pope John XXIII International Peace Prize to the humanitarian organizations of the Episcopal Conference's Caritas, the Muslim Merhamet, the Serbian Orthodox Dobrotvor and the Jewish La Benevolencija —which are particularly praiseworthy for their assistance to the war victims.*

4. Lastly, I would like to thank the authorities of Bosnia-Herzegovina for their invitation to visit Sarajevo and for all they did during my visit. Following a peace treaty, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been placed under the authority of a specific triumvirate: governed by three presidents, one of whom represents the Muslim community, another the Orthodox Serbs, while the third represents the Catholic community consisting particularly of Croats. I had the opportunity to meet this triumvirate and to discuss with each president the issues most important for the country at the present time. Through the President of the triumvirate, Mr Izetbegović, I express my feelings of gratitude to all. We will take pains to carry out the desires expressed in the discussions with regard to the Apostolic See, so as to continue to serve the good of these sorely tried people.

*“Jesus, forgive us. Jesus hear us. Jesus have mercy on us.  
Mother, beseech. Mother, implore. Mother, intercede for us.  
All you saints of God, intercede for us”.*

With these petitions I end my reflection, beseeching God yet again: *“Deliver us, Lord, from pestilence, hunger and war!”.*

Let us give thanks for the peace which has finally been achieved and let us pray that it will last. Let us pray that people will never again yield to the dangerous temptation to solve important problems between individuals and nations by armed conflict. May they be resolved only through dialogue and agreement.

*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:*

I extend a warm welcome to the pilgrimage group from the Diocese of Portsmouth. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially those from Australia, Japan, Canada and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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