



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO CARDINAL ETCHEGARAY

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Roger Etchegaray
President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*

1. I am particularly pleased to convey through you my cordial greetings and esteem to the distinguished representatives of the Christian Churches and communities and of the great world religions meeting for the international prayer meeting on the theme: "Peace Is the Name of God".

Twelve years have passed since the historic day of prayer for peace took place in Assisi at the end of October. I had strongly desired that meeting. In the tragic sight of a divided world subject to the terrible threat of war, a unanimous cry to the God of peace could not fail to rise up from the heart of every believer. Gathered on the hill of Assisi, we all prayed for a better future to the benefit of all humanity.

The day after that significant day, I urged everyone to persevere in spreading the message of peace and in the commitment to live the "spirit of Assisi", so that it might pave an ever broader and more widely shared way to reconciliation.

2. Today I am pleased to note how the dynamic of peace, which received exceptional support in Assisi, has been broadened and deepened. I cordially thank the Sant'Egidio Community, which welcomed the "spirit of Assisi" with enthusiasm and fidelity, and has continued to bring together believers of every religion and continent by inviting them to reflect on and to pray for peace. It has thus created and consolidated a pilgrimage of people of goodwill who are keen to show their brothers and sisters the peaceful name of God, whose intention is to preserve and cherish the life of every rational creature.

This year, the first phase of this symbolic peace march is taking place in Padua and then in Venice. I join it in spirit; first of all I address an affectionate greeting to Cardinal Marco Cé,

Patriarch of Venice, and to Archbishop Antonio Mattiazzo, Bishop of Padua, who are hosting this important initiative. I also greet the Christian communities of the Veneto region, who down the centuries have had the important function of acting as a bridge between East and West. History teaches how precious and useful are meetings between peoples, and how important it is to have the determination to eliminate conflicts, divisions and disagreements, to make room for the culture of tolerance, acceptance and solidarity.

This peace process must be accelerated now that there are only two years left before the dawn of the new millennium. With that historic date in sight, our expectations are laden with reflection and hope. If we consider the past centuries, and especially the past 100 years, we can easily discern many shadows in addition to the lights. How can we forget the appalling tragedies which have stricken humanity throughout the century now drawing to a close? We still vividly remember the two world wars and the atrocious slaughter they caused. And unfortunately violent and cruel massacres of defenceless men, women and children still persist today. For the believer, as for every person of good will, all this is unacceptable! Can we remain passive before such tragedies? For every right-thinking man and woman, they are a pressing call to commit themselves to praying and witnessing for peace.

3. I had these worrying situations very much in mind when in my [Message for the World Day of Peace](#) this year I wrote: "The time has come for a resolute decision to set out together on a true *pilgrimage of peace*, starting from the concrete situation in which we find ourselves. At times the difficulties can be daunting: ethnic origin, language, culture, religious beliefs are often obstacles to such a pilgrimage. To go forward together when we have behind us traumatic experiences or even age-old divisions, is not an easy thing to do" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 18 December 1996, n. 1, p. 3).

Faith, a gift from God, does not of course protect believers from the problems of history. On the contrary, it spurs them to use every means to increase awareness of the common responsibility to build peace. It is more necessary than ever to put aside the "culture of war" in order to develop a solid and lasting "culture of peace". Believers are called to make their own specific contribution to this undertaking. It must never be forgotten that wars are still tragedies which leave victims and destruction, hatred and revenge in their wake, even when they claim to put an end to fighting and to resolve conflicts.

4. In this regard, the leaders of the various religions can make a decisive contribution by raising their voices against wars and by courageously facing the risks resulting from them. Furthermore, they can stem the outbreaks of violence that periodically arise by not encouraging whatever is a source of conflict between the adherents of different beliefs and by acting to eradicate the bitter roots of distrust, hatred and enmity. It is precisely these sentiments that give rise to many conflicts. They are born and flourish in the soil of differentness, and it is in this area that one must intervene with decisiveness and courage.

To overcome the many misunderstandings which divide people and set them against one another: this is the urgent task to which all religions are called! Sincere and lasting reconciliation is the way to take if we are to allow genuine peace based on respect and mutual understanding to flourish. To be diligent artisans of peace: this is the task of every believer, especially in the historic period in which humanity is now living on the threshold of the third millennium.

In these days Venice holds a key place in the peace process. May the God of justice and peace bless and protect everyone who in these days is engaged in witnessing to the "spirit of Assisi" among the dear peoples of the Veneto region, becoming builders of solidarity for a more just and fraternal world.

Your Eminence, as I entrust you with the duty of expressing my most heartfelt solidarity to the distinguished representatives from different parts of the world and to everyone who is attending this important meeting, I assure them of my special prayers and offer my cordial greetings to them all.

From the Vatican, 1 October 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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