

ASSISI: MAY RELIGIONS BRING JUSTICE AND PEACE UPON THE EARTH

VATICAN CITY, 28 OCT 2011 (VIS) - Shortly before 4 p.m. yesterday, the Holy Father and the heads of delegation left the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi, and walked in procession across the square in front of the building. They then boarded minibuses which took them to Piazza San Francesco for the closing event of the Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world.

The ceremony began with some remarks from Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. He affirmed that the hope for peace had been revived by the Assisi meeting and exhorted everyone to be witnesses and messengers of peace. The other participants, speaking in turn, then solemnly renewed their own commitment to peace: His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, was followed by representatives of the World Lutheran Council, Sikhism, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Baptist World Alliance, Islam, the Syro-Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Taoism, Buddhism, Shintoism, the International Jewish Committee on Inter-religious Consultations, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and non-believers.

Benedict XVI then pronounced the words: "Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth Justice and Peace, Forgiveness and Life, Love".

Following a few moments of silence, a group of young people gave lighted lamps to the heads of delegation and to others present in the square; the flames of the lamps flickering in the wind were intended to represent peace, which has to be protected and conserved. Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, then invited participants to exchange a sign of peace in order to seal the commitment they had just pronounced.

Following the exchange of the sign of peace the Pope concluded by thanking the organisers of the Assisi meeting. He also made specific mention of "the many young people who have made the pilgrimage to Santa Maria degli Angeli on foot, proof of the fact that many members of the new generations are committed to overcoming violence and discord, and to promoting justice and peace".

"Today's event is an image of how the spiritual dimension is a key element in the building of peace. Through this unique pilgrimage we have been able to engage in fraternal dialogue, to deepen our friendship, and to come together in silence and prayer. After renewing our commitment to peace and exchanging with one another a sign of peace, we feel even more profoundly involved, together with all the men and women from the communities that we represent, in our common human journey. We are not being separated; we will continue to meet, we will continue to be united in this journey, in dialogue, in the daily building of peace and in our commitment to a better world, a world in which every man and woman, and every people, can live in accordance with their own legitimate aspirations. From my heart I thank all of you here present for having accepted my invitation to come to Assisi as pilgrims of truth

and peace and I greet each one of you in St. Francis' own words: May the Lord grant you peace.

During the closing hymn the Pope and the delegations descended from the podium and entered the lower basilica of St. Francis where they remained in silence over the saint's tomb. The Pontiff then greeted the Franciscan community and, accompanied by the heads of delegation, travelled by minibus to the railway station of Assisi where he boarded a train for his return to the Vatican.

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