

THE ASSEMBLY OF CATHOLIC ORDINARIES OF THE HOLY LAND
Latins, Melkites, Maronites, Sephians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Custody of the Holy Land

May 30, 2014

Let us continue to pray

A few hours after the conclusion of the Holy Land Pilgrimage of Pope Francis, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the meeting in Jerusalem between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, we still live the joy of these important days. The images of the Pope in the various meetings and the words that we have received from him are still alive in us.

Pope Francis, together with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, began this pilgrimage as messengers of Peace; together they have directed ðto the almighty and merciful God in a prayer for peace in the Holy Land and in the Middle East in general¹ The Holy Father did not want to miss any opportunity to remind forcefully his ðcloseness to those who suffer most from this conflict: I wish to state my heartfelt conviction that the time has come to put an end to this situation which has become increasingly unacceptable. For the good of all [í] Peace will bring countless benefits for the peoples of this region and for the world as a whole. And so it must resolutely be pursued, even if each side has to make certain sacrifices².

Peace is not something which can be bought or sold; peace is a gift to be sought patiently and to be ðcrafted³ through the actions, great and small, of our everyday lives. The way of peace is strengthened if we realize that we are all of the same stock and members of the one human family; if we never forget that we have the same Father in heaven and that we are all his children, made in his image and likeness.³

Thanks to the Pilgrimage of the Holy Father we have, once again, had a firsthand experience of joy in this region, but at the same time we are aware of the many serious difficulties that are still deeply present because of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. Faced with these situations, we must once again personally feel called to pray for peace and be united so that we all may really desire and positively will peace! In particular, as always, the young people had a special place in this pilgrimage and the Pope asked them specifically to join him in the prayer for peace: You can do this by offering your daily efforts and struggles to God; in this way your prayer will become particularly precious and effective. [í] Despite your difficulties in life, you are a sign of hope⁴.

The culmination of the pilgrimage was the ecumenical meeting in Jerusalem at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. As the Holy Father reminded at the airport in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem means "city of peace", and never as at this particular moment, the name corresponds to our specific vocation and expectation, also because ðThis is what God wills it to be, and such is the desire of all people of good will⁵.

On two occasions the Pope used the same words, addressing both the Palestinians and the Israelis. These are his words: «All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small

1 Apostolic Delegation (Jerusalem)

2 Bethlehem

3 International Stadium (Amman)

4 Cfr. Latin Church, Bethany beyond the Jordan

5 Ben Gurion - Tel Aviv

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gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers. All of us – especially those placed at the service of their respective peoples – have the duty to become instruments and artisans of peace, especially by our prayers».⁶

Strengthened by this appeal we want to continue to raise our prayers to God, thinking particularly of those around the world, who live, for the past several years, the last Sunday of January, the month of peace, as the Special International Day of Intercession for Peace in the Holy Land. Next year, Sunday, January 25, 2015, will be the Seventh year of this celebration. All these friends, even during the pilgrimage of the Pope, and in the previous months, were accompanying us by a special *Handout on Prayer* (www.terrasanctapax.org), which was prepared especially for the occasion. We take this opportunity to thank the many brothers and sisters who always look with eyes of love and friendship, at the Holy Land.

The Secretary General

Pietro Felet scj

⁶ Cfr. Bethlehem and Tel Aviv