

Day 1 of Pope's Pilgrimage Seen as Success

Vatican Aide Reflects on Pontiff's Idea of Peace for Region

By Mercedes de la Torre

AMMAN, Jordan, MAY 8, 2009 (Zenit.org).- Benedict XVI is in the Holy Land as a self-defined "pilgrim of peace," but he hopes to bring the region more than an absence of conflict, says a Vatican aide following the weeklong pilgrimage.

Father Caesar Atuire, the delegate administrator of Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, spoke with ZENIT about the Pope's trip, which began today in Jordan.

The Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi is the Vatican institution whose mission is to evangelize through pastoral tourism and the ministry of pilgrimage.

This trip is important, Father Atuire said, "because he is arriving in a moment in which this land is trying to find a way of living in peace among the various peoples and the Pope truly arrives as a pilgrim of peace."

"He arrives to call all those peoples who believe in the one God to this innate vocation that God has wanted to give to man, so we can seek peace in God and in respect for each other," the priest said.

"The prophet Isaiah presents the Messiah as 'the Prince of Peace,' he who is going to bring peace to the earth. And this is what we truly want: peace. The peace we seek is the biblical 'Shalom,' -- it is not just a question of leaving aside conflict in the sense of wars. We are seeking a deeper peace, meaning man living in harmony with God, with himself, and with others. This is a gift of God and it must be asked for in prayer. We can't obtain it only through political negotiations," he added.

Father Atuire affirmed: "This trip has begun very well with a lot of serenity -- because as always, before all of the Pope's trips, there are a lot of worries, there is a lot of conflict that some people want to stir up. But what we have seen is that the Pope has arrived truly as a messenger of peace. "He has been welcomed by the people, by the Muslims, by the king who is Muslim, by his family. And he has also wanted to begin his visit visiting the poor, society's most marginalized, and I think this has given a very good start to this trip."

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