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Believers of Many Faiths Seek One Truth

Participants Reflect on Importance of Assisi Meeting

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ASSISI, Italy, OCT. 28, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Pilgrims of all faith traditions who gathered at Assisi for the interfaith summit agreed that it was a historic event of great importance.

Thursday's Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World, held in Assisi, had the motto "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace."

From the very first hours of the damp and cold morning, a peaceful crowd began to gather at the doors of St. Mary of the Angels church. While security guards and volunteers carefully directed the flow of people, no one could be heard complaining about the wait.

The Holy Father arrived at 10:30 a.m. to unanimous excitement. Shouts of joy rang out, coupled with the now famous chant, "this is the youth of the Pope," a cheer that became popular at World Youth Day in Madrid.

Sunshine appeared over Assisi early in the afternoon, precisely when Benedict XVI and all the religious leaders moved from the Porziuncula (inside) to the plaza in front of the Basilica of St. Francis.

People of all ages and nationalities were at the meeting, and ZENIT began speaking with some of the youth.

There was a 10th grade Latin class present from Ettore Majorana high school. We asked three 15-year-old students, "Do you think that we will ever reach peace on earth?"

"Maybe in a hundred years," replied an apparently skeptical student. A classmate noted that "without God it would be much more difficult because it would depend entirely on us humans."

A member of a group of French people from Normandy reflected, "This is a historic event that repeats the same joy of 25 years ago. I found the speech of the Holy Father very moving, especially

when he said to work together for peace, to create a community. This is the hope that religion gives."

Among the pilgrims are many volunteers, taking this event as an opportunity for apostolate. For example, a woman from Assisi commented, "I feel involved, as a believer, because, besides serving the community, I am living this encounter close to the Pope."

"Is it possible to do apostolate with those who don't believe in God or those of a different faith?" ZENIT asked her.

"We can," the volunteer continued, "by putting into practice the values of acceptance and charity. We should act as true Christians in everyday life, and we should transmit the importance of the faith to our daily activities. The faith that we are taught should not remain merely a theory."

The Holy Father had already arrived when we met a young Turkish woman wearing a chador -- she is a student at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

"We were all created by God," she noted. "We are all important, regardless of our religion or nationality. There are values like the dignity of the human person and human rights that are fundamental for living in peace."

Asked about the condition of women in predominantly Muslim countries, the woman affirmed that this issue "is one of the most common prejudices against Islam. On the theological level I see no controversy on this topic."

In Japan, the percentage of believers is very low, particularly among young people. Nevertheless, "especially after the tragic event of the tsunami on March 11, many people have rediscovered faith and spirituality," a young Japanese explained to us. He was a representative of a Shinto delegation whose leader was on the stage with the Holy Father.

Among the crowd, the orange sari of a Hindu nun stood out. She said, "I feel very close to Benedict XVI; today's event is a beautiful gesture on the part of the Pope, a message of hope and peace. Among the many wonderful words that I have heard, I've been especially struck by the idea that God is love. The word 'love' brings us all together."

The Hindu nun agreed with the speech of Acharya Shri Shrivatsa Goswami, the representative of her religion. "I appreciated his words," she added. "A healthy ethics is necessary in economic affairs and in the just distribution of work, money, and resources. The religions ought to be spokespersons of this responsibility, and today's event was another step in that direction. The sacredness of life is also a value shared by any religious belief."

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