

Invocations of Peace By Pope, Presidents of Israel and Palestine

Both Presidents Implore God for Peace and Protection of the Holy Land

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A widely anticipated prayer initiative between the Pope and Israeli and Palestinian presidents, which consisted of praising God, asking Him for forgiveness, and invoking peace, took place on Sunday.

Pope Francis had proposed the 'Invocation for Peace' to Presidents Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas during his recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land last month.

Peres and Abbas arrived in the Vatican at 6.15 and 6.30 p.m., respectively, and were received by the Holy Father at the entrance of the Casa Santa Marta, where he spoke briefly first with the Israel president, and then with the Palestinian.

Shortly after, they entered Santa Marta where they were joined by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios I, and then transferred by car to the Vatican Gardens where they were awaited by their respective delegations. The meeting began with the following words: "May the Lord grant us peace! We are gathered here, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians and Muslims, to offer our prayer for peace for the Holy Land and for all its inhabitants."

The meeting took place in three phases, followed by a conclusion. Following the chronological order of the three religions, it began with the Jewish community, followed by Christians, and finally Muslims. The first phase, for the three communities, consisted of praise to God for the gift of creation and for having made us members of one human family. The second was a plea to God for forgiveness for not having acted like brothers and sisters, and for our sins against God

and neighbour. The third invokes from God the gift of peace in the Holy Land and the capacity to be converted into builders of peace.

Each of these phases was accompanied by a brief musical interlude. A longer musical meditation concluded each of the three principal parts. At the end, before exchanging handshakes and planting an olive tree as a symbol of the common desire for peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, the Holy Father, President Shimon Peres and President Mahmoud Abbas all gave brief discourses.

“Distinguished Presidents”, began Pope Francis, “I greet you with immense joy and I wish to offer you, and the eminent delegations accompanying you, the same warm welcome which you gave to me during my recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I am profoundly grateful to you for accepting my invitation to come here and to join in imploring from God the gift of peace. It is my hope that this meeting will be a path to seeking the things that unite, so as to overcome the things that divide. I also thank Your Holiness, my venerable Brother Bartholomaios, for joining me in welcoming these illustrious guests. Your presence here is a great gift, a much-appreciated sign of support, and a testimony to the pilgrimage which we Christians are making towards full unity.”

“Your presence, dear Presidents,” the Pope said, “is a great sign of brotherhood which you offer as children of Abraham. It is also a concrete expression of trust in God, the Lord of history, Who today looks upon all of us as brothers and Who desires to guide us in His ways. This meeting of prayer for peace in the Holy Land, in the Middle East and in the entire world is accompanied by the prayers of countless people of different cultures, nations, languages and religions: they have prayed for this meeting and even now they are united with us in the same supplication. It is a meeting which responds to the fervent desire of all who long for peace and dream of a world in which men and women can live as brothers and sisters and no longer as adversaries and enemies.”

“Our world,” he continued, “is a legacy bequeathed to us from past generations, but it is also on loan to us from our children: our children who are weary, worn out by conflicts and yearning for the dawn of peace, our children who plead with us to tear down the walls of enmity and to set out on the path of dialogue and peace, so that love and friendship will prevail. Many, all too many, of those children have been innocent victims of war and violence, saplings cut down at the height of their promise. It is our duty to ensure that their sacrifice is not in vain. The memory of these children instils in us the courage of peace, the strength to persevere undaunted in dialogue, the patience to weave, day by day, an ever more robust fabric of respectful and peaceful coexistence, for the glory of God and the good of all. Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity.”

The Holy Father said that history teaches that "our own powers do not suffice." He added that, "More than once we have been on the verge of peace, but the evil one, employing a variety of means, has succeeded in blocking it. That is why we are here, because we know and we believe

that we need the help of God. We do not renounce our responsibilities, but we do call upon God in an act of supreme responsibility before our consciences and before our peoples. We have heard a summons, and we must respond. It is the summons to break the spiral of hatred and violence, and to break it by one word alone: the word 'brother'. But to be able to utter this word we have to lift our eyes to heaven and acknowledge one another as children of one Father.”

He added: “To him, the Father, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, I now turn, begging the intercession of the Virgin Mary, a daughter of the Holy Land and our Mother. Lord God of peace, hear our prayer! We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried. But our efforts have been in vain.”

Calling on God, he said: "Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: 'Never again war!;' 'With war everything is lost'. Instil in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace. Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, You created us and You call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace, our trepidation into confident trust, and our quarrelling into forgiveness. Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words 'division', 'hatred' and 'war' be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be 'brother', and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam! Amen."

President Shimon Peres then addressed those present: “I have come from the Holy City of Jerusalem to thank you for your exceptional invitation”, he said. “The Holy City of Jerusalem is the beating heart of the Jewish people. In Hebrew, our ancient language, the word Jerusalem and the word for peace share the same root. And indeed peace is the vision of Jerusalem. As it is said in the Book of Psalms: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you'. For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.”

“During your historic visit to the Holy Land, you moved us with the warmth of your heart, the sincerity of your intentions, your modesty, and your kind ways. You touched the people’s hearts – regardless of their faith or nation. You emerged as a bridge-builder of brotherhood and peace. We are all in need of the inspiration which accompanies your character and your way. Thank you.”

He noted the desire of Israel and Palestine for peace.

“Two peoples – Israelis and Palestinians – still are aching for peace. The tears of mothers over their children are still etched in our hearts. We must put an end to the cries, to the violence, to the conflict. We all need peace. Peace between equals. Your invitation to us to join you in this momentous ceremony to call for peace, here in the Vatican garden, in the presence of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders, graciously reflects your vision of the aspiration we all share: Peace. On this moving occasion, brimming with hope and full of faith, let us all raise with you, Your Holiness, a call for peace between religions, between nations, between communities, and between fellow men and women. Let true peace become our legacy soon and swiftly.”

He added: “Our Book of Books commands upon us the way of peace, demands of us to toil for its realization. It is said in the book of Proverbs: 'Her ways are ways of grace, and all her paths are peace'. So too must our ways be. Ways of grace and peace. It is not by chance that Rabbi Akiva captured the essence of our Torah in one sentence: 'Love your neighbour like thyself.' We are all equal before the Lord. We are all part of the human family. For without peace, we are not complete, and we have yet to achieve the mission of humanity. Peace does not come easy. We must toil with all our strengths to reach it. To reach it soon. Even if it requires sacrifice or compromise. The Book of Psalms tells us: 'Whoever loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.'”

Speaking on what this means, he said: “This is to say, we are commanded to pursue after peace. All year. Every day. We greet each other with this blessing. Shalom. Salam. We must be worthy of the deep and demanding meaning of this blessing. Even when peace seems distant, we must pursue it to bring it closer. And if we pursue peace with perseverance, with faith, we will reach it. And it will endure through us, through all of us, of all faiths, of all nations, as it is written: 'They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more'. The soul is elated upon the reading of these verses of eternal vision. And we can – together and now, Israelis and Palestinians – convert our noble vision to a reality of welfare and prosperity. It is within our power to bring peace to our children. This is our duty, the holy mission of parents. Let me end with a prayer: He who makes peace in the heavens shall make peace upon us and upon all of Israel, and upon the entire world, and let us say Amen.”

Finally, President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas spoke, saying: “It is indeed a great honour for us to meet again with His Holiness Pope Francis in fulfilment of his kind invitation to relish his spiritual and noble presence, and listen to his opinion and crystal wisdom, which emanate from a sound heart, vibrant conscience, as well as an elevated ethical and religious sense. I thank your Holiness from the bottom of my heart for initiating this important gathering here in the Vatican. Simultaneously, we highly appreciate your visit to the Holy Land Palestine, and in particular to our Holy city Jerusalem and to Bethlehem, the city of love and peace, and the cradle of Jesus Christ. The visit is a sincere expression of your belief in peace and a truthful attempt to achieve peace between Palestinians and Israelis.”

“Oh God, we ever praise You for making Jerusalem our gate to heaven. As said in the Holy Quran, 'Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings we have blessed'. You made pilgrimage and

prayer in it as the best acts the faithful can make in your praise, and made your truthful promise in your say: 'Let them enter the Masjid as they did for the first time.' God Almighty has spoken the truth," Abbas said.

The Palestinian president continued, "O, Lord of Heaven and Earth, accept my prayer for the realisation of truth, peace and justice in my country Palestine, the region, and the globe as a whole. I beseech You, O Lord, on behalf of my people, the people of Palestine- Muslims, Christians and Samaritans – who are craving for a just peace, dignified living, and liberty, I beseech you, O Lord, to make prosperous and promising the future of our people, and freedom in our sovereign and independent state; Grant, Oh Lord, our region and its people security, safety and stability. Save our blessed city Jerusalem; the first Kiblah, the second Holy Mosque, the third of the two Holy Mosques, and the city of blessings and peace with all that surround it."

"Reconciliation and peace," he said, "O Lord, are our goal. God in His Holy Book has addressed the faithful: 'Make peace among you.' Here we are, O God, inclined to peace. Make firm our steps and crown our efforts and endeavours with success. You are the promoter of virtue and preventer of vice, evil and aggression. You say and you are the most truthful, 'And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah. Lo! He is the Hearer, the Knower'. In the saying of Prophet Muhammad, 'Spread the peace among you.'"

"Today," he said, "we reiterate after Jesus Christ addressing Jerusalem: 'If only you had known the path of peace this day'. Also let us remember the words of Saint John Paul II when he said: 'If peace is achieved in Jerusalem, peace will be witnessed in the whole world' Simultaneously, in our prayer today, we repeatedly call after those who advocate peace: Blessed are the peacemakers', and 'Call for the peace of Jerusalem', as came in the Holy Scriptures."

Imploring God for peace in the Holy Land, Abbas said: "Accordingly, we ask You, O Lord, for peace in the Holy Land, Palestine, and Jerusalem together with its people. We call on you to make Palestine and Jerusalem in particular a secure land for all the believers, and a place for prayer and worship for the followers of the three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and for all those wishing to visit it as it is stated in the Holy Quran."

"O Lord, You are the peace and peace emanates from You. O God of Glory and Majesty grant us security and safety, and alleviate the suffering of my people in hometown and diaspora. O Lord, bring comprehensive and just peace to our country and region so that our people and the peoples of the Middle East and the whole world would enjoy the fruit of peace, stability and coexistence. We want peace for us and for our neighbours. We seek prosperity and peace of mind for ourselves and for others alike. O Lord, answer our prayers and make successful our endeavours for you are most just, most merciful, Lord of the Worlds. Amen!" (D.C.L.)

On Zenit's Web page:

Full text of Pope's address: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-address-at-invocation-for-peace>

Full texts of both presidents' addresses: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/addresses-of-presidents-peres-and-abbas-at-invocation-for-peace>

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