



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
AT THE MEETING OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE
"PEOPLES AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, FUTURE EARTH.
RELIGIONS AND CULTURES IN DIALOGUE"**

*Piazza del Colosseo
Thursday, 7 October 2021*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters!

I greet all of you – heads of Churches, political authorities and representatives of the great world religions – and I thank you for your presence. It is good that we have gathered here, carrying in our own hearts and in the heart of Rome the faces of those entrusted to our care. Above all, it is important to pray and share, clearly and sincerely, our deep concern for the present and future of the world. Many, many believers have come together in these days to show how prayer is that quiet source of strength which brings peace and disarms hate-filled hearts. In the various meetings, we shared our conviction that a change is needed in relationships between peoples, and between peoples and the earth. That is why, here today, together we dream of *peoples as brothers and sisters* and a *future earth*.

Peoples as brothers and sisters. We proclaim this against the backdrop of the Colosseum. Long ago, this amphitheatre was the site of brutal mass entertainment: fights between men or between men and beasts. Spectacles of fratricide, deadly games played at the cost of human lives. Today, we too can be spectators of violence and war, of brothers killing brothers, like games we watch from a safe distance, indifferent, certain that they will never affect us. The suffering of others scarcely troubles us. Not even the sufferings of victims of war, migrants, young boys and girls trapped in conflicts and robbed of the carefree games of childhood. The lives of peoples and young children are not playthings. We may not be indifferent onlookers. On the contrary, we need

to empathize with those who share our humanity, its aspirations, its struggles and its frailties. We need to realize, “All of this affects me, it could have happened here too, even to me”. Today, in a globalized society that sensationalizes suffering, yet remains incapable of sympathizing with it, we need to “*construct compassion*”. We need to listen to others, make their sufferings our own and look into their faces. This takes real courage: *the courage of compassion*, a courage that goes beyond complacency, beyond the mindset of “*it doesn’t concern me*” and “*it has nothing to do with my life*”. We cannot allow the lives of entire peoples to become mere pawns in a game of power. The life of peoples is not part of a game: it is something serious and of concern to everyone. The life of peoples cannot be subject to the interests of a few, or prey to sectarian and nationalistic fervour.

War plays games with human lives. So does violence and the bane of a burgeoning arms trade, often moving in the shadows, fed by underground streams of money. I can only reiterate that “war is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 261). We cannot continue to accept wars with the detachment with which we watch the evening news, but rather make an effort to see them through the eyes of the peoples involved. Two years ago in Abu Dhabi, along with my dear brother, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, present here, we appealed to human fraternity for the sake of peace. We spoke “in the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war” (*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, 4 February 2019). As representatives of different religious traditions, all of us are called to resist the lure of worldly power, to be the voice of the voiceless, the support of the suffering, advocates of the oppressed and victims of hatred, people discarded by men and women on earth, yet precious in the sight of the One who dwells in heaven. Today they are fearful, because in all too many parts of the world, rather than dialogue and cooperation prevailing, military confrontation is once again becoming the decisive means for imposing one’s own ends.

Consequently, I would repeat my words in Abu Dhabi about the urgent task of religions “in this delicate historical situation: *to demilitarize the human heart*” (*Address at the Interreligious Meeting*, 4 February 2019). Dear brothers and sisters, as believers it is our responsibility to help eradicate hatred from human hearts and to condemn every form of violence. Let us unambiguously urge that arms be set aside and military spending reduced, in order to provide for humanitarian needs, and that instruments of death be turned into instruments of life. May ours not be empty words, but insistent appeals for the welfare of our brothers and sisters, opposing war and death in the name of the One who is peace and life. Fewer arms and more food, less hypocrisy and more transparency, more vaccines distributed fairly and fewer weapons marketed indiscriminately. Our times demand that we be the voice of all those believers, ordinary people, defenceless and weary of violence, so that those who have responsibility for the common good will commit themselves not only to condemn wars and terrorism, but also to create the conditions to prevent them from flaring up.

If peoples are to remain brothers and sisters, prayers must rise unceasingly to heaven, and one single word constantly echo on earth. That word is *peace*. Saint John Paul II dreamed of a common journey of believers, starting from the Assisi meeting and advancing towards the future. Dear friends, we are making that journey, each with his or her own religious identity, to cultivate peace in the name of God and to acknowledge that we are brothers and sisters. Pope John Paul II raised this challenge when he said, “Peace awaits its prophets. Peace awaits its builders” (*Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions*, 27 October 1986). To some this seemed empty optimism. Over the years, however, sharing and forms of dialogue between different religious worlds have increased, thus creating paths to peace. This is the true way forward. If there are those who work to foment division and conflict, we ourselves believe in the importance of journeying together for peace: with one another, and never again against one another.

Brothers and sisters, ours is a journey that demands a constant purification of the heart. Francis of Assisi asked his followers to see others as “brothers and sisters, for they were created by the one Creator”. He told them: “The peace that you proclaim with your lips, you should possess even more abundantly in your hearts” (*The Legend of the Three Companions*, XIV, 5: FF 1469). Peace is not primarily an agreement to be negotiated or a value to be celebrated, but mostly an attitude of the heart. It is born of justice; it grows in fraternity and it flourishes in gratuitousness. It summons us to “serve the truth and declare what is evil when it is evil, without fear or pretence, even and especially when it is committed by those who profess to follow the same creed as us” (*Message to the Participants in the G20 Interfaith Forum 2021*, 7 September 2021). For the sake of peace, please, in every religious tradition let us defuse the temptation to fundamentalism and every tendency to view a brother or sister as an enemy. If there are those in the grip of hostility, factions and partisan games, we ourselves repeat the words of the Imam Ali: “There are two types of people: your brothers and sisters in faith, and those who are your fellow human beings”. There is no other distinction.

Peoples as brothers and sisters who dream of peace. Today the dream of peace is linked to another dream, that of the *future earth*. This is a commitment to care for creation, for the common home that we will leave to the young who will come after us. By cultivating a contemplative and non-predatory approach, the religions are called to listen to the groans of mother earth, which suffers violence. My dear brother, Patriarch Bartholomew, present here, has helped us to realize that “to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God” (*Address in Saint Barbara*, 8 November 1997, cited in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 8).

Let us remember what the pandemic has shown us, namely that we cannot remain healthy in a world that is sick. In recent times, many people have contracted the *sickness of forgetfulness*, forgetfulness of God and of our brothers and sisters. This has led to unbridled individualism and the desire for self-sufficiency, which has overflowed in insatiable greed. The earth we inhabit bears the scars of this, while the air we breathe is rich in toxins but poor in solidarity. We have thus

poured the pollution of our hearts upon creation. In this climate of deterioration, it is encouraging to think that the same concerns and commitments are increasingly becoming the shared patrimony of many religions. Prayer and action can change the course of history. Brothers and sisters, be courageous! We have before us a vision, the same vision shared by so many young people and men and women of good will: the earth as a common home, in which peoples dwell as brothers and sisters. Yes, let us dream of religions as sisters and peoples as brothers! Sister religions to help peoples be brothers and sisters living in peace, reconciled stewards of creation, our common home. Thank you.