

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0657

Mercoledì 08.11.2000

INTERVENTO DELL'OSSERVATORE PERMANENTE DELLA SANTA SEDE PRESSO L'ORGANIZZAZIONE DELLE NAZIONI UNITE ALLA 55.MA SESSIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DELL'ONU

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Pubblichiamo di seguito l'intervento pronunciato ieri 7 novembre dall'Osservatore Permanente della Santa Sede presso l'Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite, S.E. Mons. Renato Raffaele Martino, nel corso della 55.ma Sessione dell'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite, sul tema "Bethlehem 2000":

Mr. President:

In the discussion of Item 36, Bethlehem 2000, this General Assembly once again recognizes the significance of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. This commemoration is the very foundation of the world's celebration of the new Millennium and the Great Jubilee of the Catholic Church.

The message of the angels that proclaimed "tidings of great joy", the birth of the "Messiah and Lord", (Luke 2:8-11) has been re-echoed through the ages, touching history and reminding us of the love of God.

We know that human history is a story of our families and who we are and where we have been. But I wonder how long has it been since, and how long will it be before the people living in and around Bethlehem these days might themselves hear tidings of great joy and peace.

Mr. President,

On the 25th of December, Christians throughout the world will once again turn their attention to that story of shepherds, angels, a star, a young man, his wife and a newborn infant. But, this year's celebration will be significant, as it will be the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, who we Christians believe is the true Son of God.

The United Nations began this current Fifty-fifth Session with a "Millennium Assembly" and the adoption of its Declaration. Representatives of one hundred ninety governments gathered here in New York, at the Headquarters of this organization and in this very hall and spoke, again and again of the necessity of the nations of the world to come to a better understanding of the needs of each and every person.

In a way, in the adoption of that Millennium Declaration, those representatives called for a renewal of that 'good news' proclaimed to the shepherds and "those on whom God's favor rests".

The celebration of the Millennium and, for Christians, the Great Jubilee are essentially the essence of our discussion of Bethlehem 2000. And this discussion continues to remind us that Bethlehem is a city for all peoples for all ages. It is a city of great tradition and memory, of sorrow and joy and of a "global vision of hope for all people".

But most of all, it is a city that reminds us of peace. Who can not help but visualize, upon hearing the word, that Bethlehem is the city of Rachel (Genesis 35:19-20) and Ruth, (Ruth 1:19) of David, (1 Samuel 16:1-13) and especially for us, the city of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:4).

Speaking from his heart, during his visit to Manger Square, earlier this year, His Holiness John Paul II summed up all that we seek for the city and its people: *"Where then is the dominion of the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Prince of Peace" of which the Prophet Isaiah speaks? What is the power to which Jesus himself refers when he says: "All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18)? Christ's kingdom is "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). His kingdom is not the play of force and wealth and conquest which appears to shape our human history. It is rather the power to vanquish the Evil One, the ultimate victory over sin and death. It is the power to heal the wounds which disfigure the image of the Creator in his creatures. Christ's is the power to transform our weak nature and make us capable, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, of peace with one another and communion with God himself. "To all who receive him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). This is the message of Bethlehem today and for ever. This is the extraordinary gift which the Prince of Peace brought into the world two thousand years ago."* (Pope John Paul II, Manger Square, Palestinian Territories-Bethlehem, 22 March 2000)

Let us continue to hope for the progress of the peace process in the Middle East, for the guarantee of freedom of movement and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem and throughout the region for the faithful of all religions and all nations and that the settlement of disputes might truly symbolize an "atmosphere of peace and reconciliation" for all peoples, especially those who look forward to a third Millennium in which everyone can live in harmony with one another, guided by the light, not of a star but of hope for people of good will.

On October 2nd, responding to the violence that erupted in Jerusalem and its environs at the end of September, Pope John Paul II stated that: "The Holy Land must be the land of peace and fraternity, God wills it!" (Pope John Paul II, Statement to Pilgrims visiting the Vatican, 2 October 2000).

His Holiness again conveyed his sentiments on 11 October: "With great anguish, we are following the grievous tensions in the Middle East, shaken once again by events that have caused numerous victims and that have not even spared the holy sites. Faced by this dramatic situation, I cannot but call on everyone to put an immediate end to this spiral of violence. At the same time, I invite all believers to pray to God that the people and leaders of that region may return to the path of dialogue and rediscover the joy of feeling themselves to be children of God, their common Father." (Pope John Paul II, Statement to Pilgrims visiting the Vatican, 11 October 2000).

And again, on 29 October, the Pope stated: "Once again I wish to call on all the parties involved in the peace process not to spare any efforts for the re-establishment of the climate of dialogue that existed up until a few weeks ago. Mutual trust, rejection of arms, and respect for international law are the only means capable of reviving the peace process. Therefore, we pray that there may be a return to the negotiating table and, through dialogue, arrive at the desired goal of a just and lasting peace, which guarantees to all the inalienable right to liberty and security".

Jesus Christ came as the "Prince of Peace" for all peoples, for all time. The Holy See will continue to seek and work for the peace that He brings.

Thank you Mr. President.

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