



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL CASSIDY**

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy
President of the Pontifical Council
for Promoting Christian Unity*

Through you, I am particularly pleased to send my cordial greetings to everyone attending the 12th prayer meeting organized by the Sant'Egidio Community on the theme: "*Peace is the name of God*". I am still deeply moved at recalling that memorable day in Assisi where, for the first time in history, representatives of the world's great religions gathered to ask for peace from the One who alone has the power to grant it fully. As I had occasion to say in the months that followed, I am firmly convinced that "on that day, and in the prayer which was its motivation, there seemed for a moment to be even a visible expression of the hidden but radical unity ... among the men and women of this world" (*Christmas Address to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 1986; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 5 January 1987, p. 6). This vision, which in substance is what I have called "the spirit of Assisi", should be taken up again and communicated so that new energies of peace can be fostered everywhere. On that day a path was opened which the Sant'Egidio Community has courageously blazed, enabling more and more men and women of various religions and cultures to take part in it. Thus, the "vision" of Assisi has taken shape in many European cities, including Warsaw, Brussels, Milan and, last year, Padua. It is not by chance that this pilgrimage, now enriched by 12 years of experience, has reached Romania, making a stop in Bucharest, a city which on this occasion has become in a sense the geographical centre of a Europe that, with its wealth of peoples and cultures, must rebuild a broad and harmonious unity from which no one is excluded.

I would like to greet all the Romanian people, to whom I am close in spirit. I greet the President of the Republic and his Government, and I thank them for their invitation to visit Romania, which I hope to do. I offer a fraternal greeting in particular to His Beatitude Patriarch Theoctist, to the Metropolitan, to the Bishops and to all the people of the venerable Orthodox Church of Romania. With affection and esteem I greet the Catholic Bishops and communities of Romania, whether of the Latin or the Byzantine rite, and I urge them to persevere courageously in bearing witness to Christ and his Gospel. I extend my fraternal greeting to all the other Christian denominations and to the other religions in that noble

country. This great manifestation of prayer for peace fits in perfectly with Romania's unique vocation of being a bridge between East and West, of offering an original synthesis of European cultures and traditions.

The notable presence of venerable Patriarchs, Primates and Bishops of the Orthodox Churches makes this meeting highly significant for all Christianity. I send them my fraternal and affectionate kiss of peace, so that they may convey it to their beloved Churches. It is truly a precious gift that such distinguished representatives of Orthodoxy are meeting today with representatives of the Catholic Church and other Western Christian Communities to reflect together on so important a theme. Their presence at this meeting, precisely on the threshold of the third millennium, spurs us to raise our prayer to God with special confidence, so that the world will see Christians "less divided". The way will become clearer, the more we meet and love one another, showing in this way the joy that unites us. This meeting in Bucharest thus appears as a true moment of grace. We need to remember, both for ourselves and for the world, that what unites us is much stronger than what divides us.

This meeting has a lofty spiritual meaning, because it sees Christians gathered with representatives of the world's great religions. I extend my respectful greeting to them as well. They know how much I esteem their religious traditions: during my apostolic visits I never forget to meet their representatives and to acknowledge their noble mission in the various countries. While stressing the important role that religions play in contemporary human life, their presence in such large and distinguished numbers reminds us of the need to demonstrate the unity of nations, to teach peace and respect, to foster friendship and dialogue.

Yes, we need this commitment. Unfortunately, in recent decades, although notable advances have been made on the way of peace, we have witnessed the growth of many conflicts: wars in various parts of the world often involve the poorest countries, making their difficult situation even worse. I am thinking of Africa, tormented by conflict and an endemic situation of instability. I am also thinking of Kosovo, not far from here, where for too long entire populations have suffered atrocities and torture in the name of senseless ethnic rivalries. Lastly, I am thinking of the peace processes now under way in the Middle East and in other parts of the world but threatened by constantly recurring difficulties. Given the increased number of conflict situations, it is necessary to develop new energies of peace, for which religions are a valuable resource. During the 1993 meeting held in Milan, the religious leaders present signed an appeal which has lost none of its force: "May no hatred, no conflict, no war be kindled by religions! War can never be justified by religion. May the words spoken by religions always be words of peace! May the way of faith lead to dialogue and understanding! May religions guide hearts to bring peace on earth! May religions help all men and women to love the earth and its peoples both great and small!".

Religions manifest the universal longing for harmony and understanding that comes from a sincere love of God. This gathering therefore has fittingly chosen the title: "*God, Humankind, Peoples*", three realities which must remain vitally linked. Every individual and every people can discover their authentic vocation to the extent that they look to the One who is above everyone and who accompanies all human beings towards that common future which you are already expressing in a certain way at this meeting.

Your Eminence, I entrust you with the task of greeting each representative of the Churches and Christian Communities, as well as those of the great world religions, assuring all the participants of my affectionate remembrance, accompanied

by a fervent prayer to our common Father, that all the peoples of the earth, after forsaking the ways of violence, will commit themselves to the path of peace.

From Castel Gandolfo, 26 August 1998.

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