

BENEDICT XVI: A JUST AND LASTING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

VATICAN CITY, JUL 23, 2006 (VIS) - At midday today, before praying the Angelus with thousands of pilgrims and local residents at Les Combes in the Italian region of Valle d'Aosta where he is spending a brief vacation, the Pope renewed the appeal he launched last Thursday for a cease-fire in the Middle East.

After recalling how, following the worsening of the situation in the Middle East, he had proclaimed this Sunday as a special day of prayer and penance, inviting pastors, faithful and all believers to implore from God the gift of peace, the Holy Father said: "I forcibly renew my appeal to the conflicting parties to begin an immediate cease-fire, to allow the passage of humanitarian aid and, with the support of the international community, to seek ways to begin negotiations.

"I take this opportunity," he added, "to reiterate the right of the Lebanese to the integrity and sovereignty of their country, of the Israelis to live in peace in their State, and of the Palestinians to have their own free and sovereign homeland."

The Holy Father expressed his particular closeness to the "defenseless civilian population, unjustly involved in a conflict of which they are only victims: both those in Galilee who are forced to live in shelters, and the great multitudes of Lebanese who, once again, are seeing their country destroyed and have been forced to abandon everything to seek refuge elsewhere.

"I raise a sorrowful prayer to God that the vast majority of people's aspiration to peace may be realized as soon as possible, through the harmonious commitment of leaders. I also renew my appeal to all charitable organizations to bring those people the concrete expression of shared solidarity."

Benedict XVI then recalled that Saturday marked the liturgical memory of St. Mary Magdalene, "the Lord's disciple who occupies a leading role in the Gospels," and that today is the day of St. Bridget of Sweden, "one of the patrons of Europe who lived in Rome and made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land." Let us, he added, "ask her to help humanity today to create great spaces for peace, and especially to obtain from the Lord peace in that Holy Land towards which she had such profound affection and veneration."

"I entrust humanity entire to the power of divine love," the Pope concluded. "And I invite everyone to pray that the beloved people of the Middle East may be capable of abandoning the path of armed conflict and of building, through the courage of dialogue, a just and lasting peace. Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us!"

ANG/PEACE:MIDDLE EAST/...

VIS 060724 (450)

TESTIMONY TO GOD'S VICTORY THROUGH NON-VIOLENCE

VATICAN CITY, JUL 23, 2006 (VIS) - This afternoon, Benedict XVI travelled to the small church of Rhemes Saint Georges, a few kilometers from Les Combes, the Italian alpine resort where he is spending a brief holiday. There he participated in the day of prayer and penance for peace between Lebanon and Israel.

The Pope arrived at the church in the company of Bishop Giuseppe Anfossi of Aosta, and greeted the faithful gathered there. Following the liturgy of the Word, the Holy Father referred to "the dramatic situation in the Middle East ... where war persists between Christians, Muslims and Jews." He exclaimed: "Lord, free us from all evil and grant us peace; not tomorrow or the day after, grant us peace today!"

Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of the Christian perspective as a way "to end violence and overcome evil. ... At this time, in which there is great abuse of the name of God," he added, "we must affirm that the cross wins by love, affirming [also] the countenance of God which triumphs and brings light and reconciliation to the world. ... We need the testimony of God's victory though non-violence."

"Violence must be answered with love like that of Christ, that reaches unto death," he concluded. "This is God's humble way of winning, not with a stronger empire but with love that endures to the very end. ... Jesus' reconciliation and sacrifice are not in vain. ... There is a network of Eucharistic communion that overcomes cultural differences. ... This is the force for peace in the world."

BXVI-VISIT/DAY PEACE MIDDLE EAST/RHEMES

VIS 060724 (270)