



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL ROGER ETCHEGARAY
FOR THE 15th INTERNATIONAL MEETING
OF PRAYERS FOR PEACE HELD IN BARCELONA**

To Cardinal Roger Etchegaray

President emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

Through you, I am pleased to address my cordial greeting to the distinguished representatives of the great world religions who this year are meeting in Barcelona for the 15th International Meeting of Prayers for Peace on the theme: *"On the frontiers of dialogue: religions and cultures in the new century"*.

The meeting is an important landmark, not only because this is its 15th celebration, but because with it you would like to point out the way into this new time. Not only the discussions and reflections that you have had during these days but above all your presence is showing the world how good it is to start the 21st century not with disagreements but with a shared vision: the dream of the unity of the human family.

I made this dream my own in October 1986, when I invited my Christian brethren and the leaders of the great world religions to Assisi to pray for peace: together and no longer against one another. Indeed, I wanted everyone, young and old, women and men, in a world still divided into two blocs and conditioned by the fear of nuclear war, to feel called to build a future of peace and prosperity. I had as it were a great vision before my eyes: all the peoples of the world walking from different parts of the earth to gather before the one God as a single family. On that memorable evening, in the town of St Francis' birth, my dream came true: it was the first time that representatives of the world's different religions had gathered together.

Fifteen years have passed since then. I make the most of this opportunity to express deep gratitude to the Community of Sant'Egidio for supporting that initiative and for following it up,

promoting it with hope, year after year, so that efforts for peace may be pursued without weakening even in the midst of great misfortunes. These days are spent in an atmosphere of brotherhood which I chose to call the "spirit of Assisi". In recent years a deep friendship has developed that has spread to many parts of the world and produced abundant fruits of peace. Through prayer and reflection, many religious figures have joined those who were the first to come here. Even non-believers, honestly seeking the truth, participated with dialogue at those meetings and found them a great help.

I thank God, who is rich in mercy and grace, for the headway we have made in these years. I congratulate you all on this project. The men and women of the world see how you have learned to be together and to pray, each of you in accordance with his own religious tradition, without confusion and in mutual respect, keeping your own beliefs sound and intact. In a society in which people of different religions live side by side, this meeting is a sign of peace. Everyone can see how, in this spirit, peace among peoples is no longer a distant utopia.

I then dare to state that these meetings have come to be a "sign of the times", as Bl. John XXIII, of venerable memory, would have said. A fitting sign for the 21st century and for the third millennium, increasingly marked by cultural and religious pluralism, so that from the very first their future may be enlightened by fraternal dialogue and thus open to peaceful encounter. You visibly demonstrate how to overcome one of the most sensitive and urgent boundaries of our time. It is obvious that interreligious dialogue is not only important in "warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 55), but also and above all it establishes a sure basis for peace. All of us, as believers, have a serious and exciting task: "The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: *a name of peace and a summons to peace*" (*ibid.*).

You have gathered in this Catalonian city that is so dear to me, which looks out over the Mediterranean and beyond, towards wider horizons. On this occasion I extend a fraternal greeting to the Archdiocese of Barcelona and to its distinguished Archbishop, Cardinal María Carles Gordò, for taking part in the organization of this meeting. I likewise offer my respectful greeting to the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, and to its President, to the municipality of Barcelona and to its mayor, who have made this praiseworthy initiative possible.

Together, dear brothers and sisters, "we must put out into the deep" in ecumenical dialogue. May the third millennium be the one of unity around the one Lord: Jesus Christ. We can no longer tolerate the scandal of division: it is a repeated "no" to God's love. Let us give voice to the strength of the love he has shown us, so that we may dare to walk together.

With you, dear representatives of the great world religions, we must also "put out into the deep", into the great ocean of this world, to help everyone to look up and direct their gaze to the one God and Father of all the earth's peoples. Let us recognize that differences do not drive us to conflict

but to respect, loyal collaboration and the building of peace. We must stake everything on dialogue and love as the only paths that will enable us to respect the rights of each person and face the great challenges of the new millennium.

From the Vatican, 28 August, the Feast of St Augustine

JOHN PAUL II

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana