

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

VISIT TO YAD VASHEM MEMORIAL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Jerusalem
Monday, 11 May 2009

“I will give in my house and within my walls a memorial and a name ... I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off” (Is 56:5).

This passage from the Book of the prophet Isaiah furnishes the two simple words which solemnly express the profound significance of this revered place: *yad* – “memorial”; *shem* – “name”. I have come to stand in silence before this monument, erected to honor the memory of the millions of Jews killed in the horrific tragedy of the *Shoah*. They lost their lives, but they will never lose their names: these are indelibly etched in the hearts of their loved ones, their surviving fellow prisoners, and all those determined never to allow such an atrocity to disgrace mankind again. Most of all, their names are forever fixed in the memory of Almighty God.

One can rob a neighbor of possessions, opportunity or freedom. One can weave an insidious web of lies to convince others that certain groups are undeserving of respect. Yet, try as one might, one can never take away the *name* of a fellow human being.

Sacred Scripture teaches us the importance of names in conferring upon someone a unique mission or a special gift. God called Abram “Abraham” because he was to become the “father of many nations” (Gen 17:5). Jacob was called “Israel” because he had “contended with God and man and prevailed” (Gen 32:29). The names enshrined in this hallowed monument will forever hold a sacred place among the countless descendants of Abraham. Like his, their faith was tested. Like Jacob, they were immersed in the struggle to discern the designs of the Almighty. May the names of these victims never perish! May their suffering never be denied, belittled or forgotten! And may all people of goodwill remain vigilant in rooting out from the heart of man anything that could lead to tragedies such as this!

The Catholic Church, committed to the teachings of Jesus and intent on imitating his love for all people, feels deep compassion for the victims remembered here. Similarly, she draws close to all those who today are subjected to persecution on account of race, color, condition of life or religion – their sufferings are hers, and hers is their hope for justice. As Bishop of Rome and Successor of the Apostle Peter, I reaffirm – like my predecessors – that the Church is committed to praying and working tirelessly to ensure that hatred will

never reign in the hearts of men again. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of peace (cf. Ps 85:9).

The Scriptures teach that it is our task to remind the world that this God lives, even though we sometimes find it difficult to grasp his mysterious and inscrutable ways. He has revealed himself and continues to work in human history. He alone governs the world with righteousness and judges all peoples with fairness (cf. Ps 9:9).

Gazing upon the faces reflected in the pool that lies in stillness within this memorial, one cannot help but recall how each of them bears a name. I can only imagine the joyful expectation of their parents as they anxiously awaited the birth of their children. What name shall we give this child? What is to become of him or her? Who could have imagined that they would be condemned to such a deplorable fate!

As we stand here in silence, their cry still echoes in our hearts. It is a cry raised against every act of injustice and violence. It is a perpetual reproach against the spilling of innocent blood. It is the cry of Abel rising from the earth to the Almighty. Professing our steadfast trust in God, we give voice to that cry using words from the Book of Lamentations which are full of significance for both Jews and Christians:

*“The favors of the Lord are not exhausted, his mercies are not spent;
They are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness.
My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore will I hope in him.
Good is the Lord to the one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him;
It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord” (Lam 3:22-26).*

My dear friends, I am deeply grateful to God and to you for the opportunity to stand here in silence: a silence to remember, a silence to pray, a silence to hope.

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