



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ROME

*Hall of Popes
Friday, 11 October 2013*

Dear Friends of the Jewish Community of Rome, *Shalom!*

I am pleased to welcome you and to have the opportunity to deepen and expand upon the first meeting that was held with several of your representatives on 20 March. I greet all of you with affection, especially the Chief Rabbi, Dr Riccardo Di Segni, whom I thank for the words which he has addressed to me. I also wish to thank him for reminding me of the courage of our father Abraham, when he struggled with the Lord to save Sodom and Gomorrah: “and if there were thirty, and if there were twenty-five, and if there were twenty...”. It is truly a courageous intercession to the Lord. Thank you. I also wish to greet the President of the Jewish Community of Rome, Dr Riccardo Pacifici, and the President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Dr Renzo Gattegna.

As the Bishop of Rome, I feel particularly close to the life of the city's Jewish community: I know that with an uninterrupted presence of more than two thousand years, it is Western Europe's most ancient community. For many centuries then, the Jewish community and the Church of Rome have lived together in this, our city, through a history — we well know — often marked by misunderstanding and even genuine injustice. Yet it is a story that, with God's help, has for many decades now seen the development of friendly and fraternal relations.

On the part of Catholics, the reflection carried out at the Second Vatican Council has certainly contributed to this change in mentality. However, a contribution of no little import has also come from the lives and action, on both sides, of wise and generous men who were able to recognize the call of the Lord and head courageously down new paths of encounter and dialogue.

Paradoxically, the common tragedy of the war has taught us to journey together. In just a few days we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Rome. We will remember and pray for the many innocent victims of inhuman cruelty and for their families. It will also be an occasion to heighten our attention and be watchful so that forms of intolerance and anti-Semitism do not recur under any pretext, here in Rome and in the rest of the world. I have said it on other occasions and I would like to repeat it now: it is a contradiction for a Christian to be anti-Semitic. His roots are a bit Jewish. A Christian cannot be an anti-Semite! May anti-Semitism be banished from the heart and life of every man and every woman!

The anniversary will also be an occasion which allows us to remember how in the hour of darkness the Christian community of this city reached out to its brother in trouble. We know that many religious institutes, monasteries and the Papal Basilicas themselves, understanding the will of the Pope, opened their doors in fraternal welcome, and how many common Christians offered whatever help they were able to give, great or small as the case might be.

The vast majority were not aware of the need to update the Christian understanding of Judaism and perhaps they knew very little about the life of the Jewish community. However, they had the courage to do the right thing at the time: protect their brother who was in danger. I like to emphasize this aspect, because if it is true that it is important, on both sides, to deepen theological reflection through dialogue, it is also true that there is another vital dialogue, that of everyday experience, which is equally fundamental. Indeed, without the latter, without a real and concrete culture of encounter that leads to authentic relationships, without prejudice and suspicion, engagement in the intellectual field would serve but little. Here, too, as I often like to emphasize, the People of God have their own nose and they sense the path that God is asking them to take. In this case it is the path of friendship, closeness and fraternity.

I hope to contribute here in Rome, as its Bishop, to this closeness and friendship, as I also had the grace — for indeed it was a grace — to do with the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. Among the many things that can unite us is our common witness to the truth of the “Ten Commandments”, the Decalogue, as a solid foundation and source of life for our society, which is so disoriented by an extreme pluralism of choice and direction, and marked by a relativism which leads to no longer having sure and solid points of reference (cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Synagogue of Rome*, 17 January 2010, 5-6).

Dear friends, I wish to thank you for your visit, and with you I invoke the protection and blessing of the Most High upon our common journey of friendship and trust. May he, in his goodness, grant his peace in our day. Thank you.