

## Pilgrims in Assisi

On the 27th October the Vatican organized a 'Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world' to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the historic gathering in Assisi, Italy, in 1987.

This year's event was led by Pope Benedict and included representatives from several Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, including Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, as well as non-religious people. The event included talks, a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Saint Francis and prayers.

God's people are called in Scripture to pray for peace. Moreover Christians have a message of hope and peace to proclaim to the world, for we are ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why should there be so much trouble and injustice in the world? The Bible tells us plainly. Sin is the underlying cause of war and strife between nations, in our communities, in our families and even in our hearts. Sin is the root of all human misery for it separates us from God. There can be no genuine peace between us as long as we remain at enmity with the Creator. Even as Cardinal Koch rightly noted, "Let us remember that there is no peace without justice; that there is no justice without forgiveness".

But where can we find forgiveness, justice and peace? Left to its own resources, humanity is hopelessly lost. Sinners do not naturally seek the Light; they rather run in the opposite direction into deeper darkness. Through its wisdom the world will never find God. Religion, fasting, prayers and meditations cannot make up for sin.

Our only hope is Jesus Christ. Only his blood cleanses the soul from sin. 'No one,' he said, 'comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). He came down from heaven for this very purpose, that sinners may be reconciled to God by his death on the cross. There is no other way, even as the Apostle Peter said, 'There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

Sadly that was not the message given in Assisi. Instead the representatives of the world religions heard the Pope cry, 'In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth justice and peace, forgiveness and life, love.'

Alas! Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, good will, religion, science or philosophy cannot save. Christ alone saves. He alone is the Saviour of the world. To seek forgiveness in human religion is like searching for water in a dry well.

We Christians are already satisfied with the living water Jesus gave us. We cannot pretend to be searching for the truth we already possess, nor can we keep it to ourselves. The clear proclamation of Jesus as the only Saviour is the unique and absolutely essential contribution that Christians should make to address the desperate plight of humanity.

True, there could be no peace without justice, and no justice without forgiveness. But these – forgiveness, justice and peace – are found in Jesus Christ alone, and in no-one and nothing else.