

Another Plea on Iraq Still Room for Peace, Says John Paul II

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 16, 2003 (Zenit.org).- Here is a translation of the address John Paul II gave today, before reciting the midday Angelus with the crowds gathered in St. Peter's Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. Yesterday, the Spiritual Exercises ended here, in the Apostolic Palace. They were days of intense recollection and listening to the Word of God.

The theme of the meditations proposed was the central truth of the Christian faith: "God is Love." In the silence of prayer we were able to contemplate at length this Good News, of which the world is always in need. We must not lose confidence, in the face of a humanity marked by grave imbalances and so much violence: The love of God, which shines in all its fullness on the face of Christ, is reflected faithful and merciful over this world.

2. Only Christ can renew hearts and give hope again to peoples. Today's liturgy, in presenting the mysterious event of the Transfiguration, allows us to experience the power of his light, which overcomes the darkness of doubt and evil.

From this perspective of faith, I wish to renew an urgent appeal to multiply the commitment to prayer and penance, to invoke from Christ the gift of his peace. There is no peace without conversion of heart.

The next few days will be decisive for the outcome of the Iraqi crisis. Let us pray, therefore, to the Lord to inspire in all sides of the dispute courage and farsightedness.

The political leaders of Baghdad certainly have the urgent duty to collaborate fully with the international community, to eliminate every motive for armed intervention. To them I address my urgent appeal: The fate of fellow citizens is always the priority!

But I would also like to remind the member countries of the United Nations, and in particular those that make up the Security Council, that the use of force represents the last recourse, after having exhausted every other peaceful solution, in keeping with the well-known principles of the U.N. Charter itself.

Here is why, in the face of the tremendous consequences that an international military operation would have for the population of Iraq and the balance of the entire Middle East region, already sorely tried, as well as for the extremisms that could ensue, I say to all: There is still time to negotiate; there is still room for peace; it is never too late to come to an understanding and to continue discussions.

To reflect on one's duties, to engage in energetic negotiations does not mean to be humiliated, but to work with responsibility for peace.

Moreover, we Christians are convinced that real and lasting peace is not only the fruit, though necessary, of political agreements and understanding between individuals and peoples, but a gift of God to all those who submit themselves to him and accept with humility and gratitude the light of his love.

3. Let us go forward confidently, dear Brothers and Sisters, in our Lenten journey. May Mary Most Holy obtain for us that this Lent will not be remembered as a sad time of war, but as a period of courageous effort for conversion and peace. We entrust this intention to the special intercession of St. Joseph, whose solemnity we will celebrate next Wednesday.

[After praying the Angelus, John Paul II said the following:]

I belong to that generation that lived through World War II and, thanks be to God, survived it. I have the duty to say to all young people, to those who are younger than me, who have not had this experience: "No more war!" as Paul VI said during his first visit to the United Nations. We must do everything possible! We know well that peace is not possible at any cost. But we all know how great this responsibility is -- therefore, prayer and penance!

[Translation by ZENIT]
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