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Pope prays Assisi pilgrimage will foster peace

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Oct. 26, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI prayed that his interreligious pilgrimage to Assisi would promote dialogue among believers of different faiths and help the world move toward peace and reconciliation.

"In a world still torn by hatred, divisions, selfishness and wars, we want to pray that tomorrow's meeting in Assisi would promote dialogue among people of different religions," the pope said Oct. 26 during a prayer service at the Vatican.

Pope Benedict prayed that the Assisi meeting would help "enlighten the minds and hearts of all men and women so that anger would give way to pardon, division to reconciliation, hatred to love, violence to meekness, so that peace would reign in the world."

"We ask God for the gift of peace. We want to pray that he make us instruments of his peace," the pope said at the Christian prayer service, which was attended by cardinals and bishops, as well as Orthodox and Protestant leaders. Several Muslim representatives also were present.

The prayer service took the place of the pope's weekly general audience. About 25,000 people were expected for the service planned for St. Peter's Square, but a rainstorm forced the Vatican to pack the Vatican audience hall to overflowing and to accommodate others in St. Peter's Basilica, where Pope Benedict stopped briefly to give his blessing.

In his homily during the prayer service, Pope Benedict said Christ came to bring peace to the world and his followers have a serious obligation to proclaim his love, salvation and peace to all peoples.

The instrument Christ used to inaugurate his kingdom of peace was the cross, the pope said. Love, and not weapons, is the key.

Those who want to be true disciples of Christ, he said, also must be ready "to lose their lives for him, so that goodness, love and peace will triumph in the world."

The Gospel says Jesus sent his disciples out as "lambs among the wolves," the pope said.

"Christians must never give in to the temptation to become 'wolves among the wolves'; the kingdom of Christ's peace is not spread with power, strength or violence, but with self-giving, with love taken to the extreme, even toward one's enemies."

Christians must begin by making their own communities "islands of peace" where differences of race, language and economic standing have no importance, he said.

The readings for the prayer service were in English and Italian; the prayer petitions were read in German, Polish, French, Portuguese, Swahili, Arabic, Spanish and Chinese.

The prayers asked God for the gifts "of wisdom and intelligence that make us disciples of truth," for the strength needed "to discover the paths of true peace," and for forgiveness for "our pride, for the selfishness and the violence that often accompanies our choices and lifestyles."
The prayer in Arabic asked God to help Christians treasure the word and example of Jesus and "stay far from war and violence in all its forms."

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