



Meeting with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem on Monday, Pope Francis said that the different religions in Jerusalem must live together in peace, preserving dignity and rights so that suffering and violence can end.

“The Holy City, whose Status Quo must be defended and preserved, ought to be a place where all can live together peaceably; otherwise, the endless spiral of suffering will continue for all,” the Pope said Oct. 23.

He expressed his closeness to all those who have suffered due to the conflict affecting the Holy Land for many years. The uncertainty of the situation and the lack of understanding between different groups continue to create insecurity, he noted.

And this insecurity, along with a restriction of fundamental rights, causes people to flee from their land. “I invoke God’s help in this,” he said, “and I ask all those involved to intensify their efforts to achieve a stable peace based on justice and recognition of the rights of all.”

To do this, we must reject all violence, discrimination or intolerance against people of Jewish, Christian or Muslim faith and their places of worship, the Pope emphasized.

Pope Francis spoke during a meeting with His Beatitude Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, offering his greeting to all of the members of the various Christian communities in the Holy Land.

He explained that it is his hope that Christians in the Holy Land will continue to be recognized as an integral part of the society and that they may continue to contribute to the common good and the growth of peace.

“This contribution will be the more effective to the extent that there is harmony among the region’s different Churches. Particularly important in this regard would be increased cooperation in supporting Christian families and young people, so that they will not be forced to leave their land,” he said.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem had an audience with Pope Francis during a visit to Rome Oct. 22-25. He was accompanied by Archbishop

Aristarchos of Constantina and Archdeacon Markos.

Pope Francis and Patriarch Theophilos III have met on two previous occasions. Once during the Pope's pilgrimage to Jerusalem in May 2014 and again in June of the same year during an Invocation for Peace held in the Vatican Gardens.

In their meeting Monday, Francis said that we must continue to look toward the future and toward reconciliation, not letting ourselves get bogged down by past failures and mistakes. "I know that past wounds continue to affect the memory of many people," he said.

"It is not possible to change the past, but, without forgetting grave failures of charity over the centuries, let us look to a future of full reconciliation and fraternal communion, and take up the work before us, as the Lord desires."

The Pope explained that to not take up our work of reconciliation and communion today would be "an even graver fault," because to do this would be to disregard "the urgent call of Christ."

"May we not let the memory of times marked by lack of communication or mutual accusations, or present difficulties and uncertainty about the future, prevent us from walking together towards visible unity," he continued.

We also shouldn't let it keep us from praying and working together to serve those in need and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

After their meeting, Patriarch Theophilos also met with Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin and Secretary for Relations with States Archbishop Paul Gallagher.

He also met with Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and with Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

"Here," the Pope said, "I would reaffirm my heartfelt desire and commitment to progress on our way to full unity, in obedience to Jesus' fervent prayer in the Cenacle 'that they may all be one... so that the world may believe' (Jn 17:21)."

He pointed out that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been an active and constructive participant in the ongoing theological dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, which he finds a "sign of hope on our journey."

"How good it would be to say of Catholics and Orthodox living in Jerusalem," he said, "what the Evangelist Luke said of the first Christian community: 'All who believed were together... one heart and soul' (Acts 2:44, 4:32)."

Concluding his speech, the Pope thanked Theophilos for his visit and reaffirmed his closeness to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

“I hope and pray that the day of a stable and lasting peace for all will soon come,” he said.

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