

REFLECTIONS ON POPE BENEDICT XVI'S MONTHLY INTENTIONS

July 2009

Editor's Note: Apostleship of Prayer receives monthly prayer intentions from Pope Benedict XVI and urges Christians throughout the world to unite in prayer for those intentions. The reflections below seek to illuminate the Holy Father's concerns.

General Intention

Christians in the Middle East. *That Christians in the Middle East may live their faith in complete freedom and become instruments of reconciliation and peace.*



Pope Benedict XVI is concerned about the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land. Now less than two percent of the population is Christian in the land where Jesus was born, preached, died, and rose from the dead. Christianity has an architectural and archeological presence in the Holy Land, but the faith is in danger of losing its ecclesial presence.

Why are Christians leaving the Holy Land? Like many others who leave the region, Christians are emigrating in pursuit of economic opportunity, democratic freedoms, and peace.

While understanding the good reasons for leaving the region, the Pope says the Holy Land needs Christians because it is torn by conflict. Of all the religions, Christianity is - or should be - the great reconciler. Pope Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II, pointed out that there can be no peace in the Middle East without forgiveness. Jesus emphasized forgiving others as the way to peace with God and with others.

On the one hand, Christianity is unaffected by conditions in the Holy Land. Our faith doesn't depend on land or shrines or particular places for worship, sacrifice, or burial. Jesus Christ is "God with us," for he "lives in our hearts by faith," as St. Paul wrote. Since the first century, Christianity has welcomed all people with no requirements except to believe, repent, and be baptized. In Christ we are all one - Jew and gentile, rich and poor, male and female. The Spirit of God transcends all human and geographical divisions.

Yet there is something special about the Holy Land. It is the setting for the events described in the Bible, the Word of God on which our faith rests.



We pray this month that Holy Land Christians may serve as a yeast of reconciliation, justice, and peace in that strife-torn part of the world. We are one with the Christians in the Holy Land. We pray that they may persevere in safety as they witness to the gospel.

Reflection:

How can you show your solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land?

Reading:

Matthew 13:33 *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened."*

Mission Intention

Humanity Reconciled. *Through the witness of the faithful, may the Church be the seed and soil of a humanity reconciled to be God's one true family on earth.*



In the mission intention the Holy Father extends the theme of reconciliation he speaks of in the general intention. He asks us to pray that all people become reconciled as God's one true family and that the Church may be both "seed and soil" of a reconciled humanity.

To be reconciled as the Holy Father uses the word means to be united to God and to others. Our reconciliation or union with God starts with the seed, the Word of God that the Church scatters upon the earth. This is the preaching of the Gospel.

But we know from the parable that scattering the seed is not enough. The seed on dry ground never sprouts, rocky ground can't nourish it, and thorny ground chokes it out. What's needed is rich soil. Then the seed bears much fruit.

What is the rich soil that bears fruit? The Pope makes it clear: rich soil is the unity of believers. At the last supper, Jesus told his disciples: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). And he went on to pray that his followers would be one as he and the Father are one. The purpose for their unity is missionary: "that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me" (John 17:20-23).

If Christians are divided and in conflict, how will the world ever believe that reconciliation is possible? Are there divisions in the Catholic Church? Are there divisions in your diocese or in your parish?

If we cannot show the world our loving unity, we are scattering seed to little purpose. To the extent

we can unite in love will we be fruitful in our missionary efforts.

How do we accomplish the unity Jesus requires? We begin by loving each other, washing one another's feet, and respecting every single person as a person for whom Christ died. We pray for the reconciliation of all people into one great family of God.

Reflection:

To whom may you show love for the sake of Christian unity?

Reading:

Matthew 13:23 *"The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit."*



Prayer of the Month

Oh Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen the love and commitment of your people in Jerusalem and the Holy Land in this time of uncertainty and challenge. May they abide in your promise: "Peace I leave with you: My peace I give you." we pray for peace with justice in the Middle East, healing for the wounded and broken hearted, and dignity for all. Amen.

- prayer adapted from www.4hurtingchristians.com

To register as a member of the Apostleship of Prayer, to subscribe to leaflets, or to order additional leaflets for distribution to others, please contact us. Thank you for your generous support of our ministry.

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

3211 South Lake Dr., Ste. 216
Milwaukee, WI 53235

414-486-1152

www.apostleshipofprayer.org

Copyright, 2009: Apostleship of Prayer