

“True dialogue is rooted in love, the only foundation of peace, justice and reconciliation”

Pope Leo XIV dedicated his 29 October general audience to the 60th anniversary of the conciliar declaration “*Nostra aetate*.”

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Dear brothers and sisters, pilgrims in faith and representatives of the

various religious traditions! Good morning, welcome!

At the centre of today's reflection, in this General Audience dedicated to interreligious dialogue, I would like to place the Lord Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (*Jn 4:24*). In the Gospel, this encounter reveals the essence of authentic religious dialogue: an exchange that is established when people open up to one another with sincerity, attentive listening and mutual enrichment. It is a dialogue that arose from thirst: God's thirst for the human heart, and the human thirst for God. At the well of Sychar, Jesus overcomes the barriers of culture, gender and religion. He invites the Samaritan woman to a new understanding of worship, which is not limited to a particular place – "neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem" – but is

realized *in Spirit and truth*. This moment captures the very core of interreligious dialogue itself: the discovery of God's presence beyond all boundaries and the invitation to seek him together with reverence and humility.

Sixty years ago, on 28 October 1965, Vatican Council II, with the promulgation of the Declaration Nostra Aetate, opened up a new horizon of encounter, respect and spiritual hospitality. This luminous Document teaches us to meet the followers of other religions not as outsiders, but as travelling companions on the path of truth; to honour differences affirming our common humanity; and to discern, in every sincere religious search, a reflection of the one divine Mystery that embraces all creation.

In particular, it should not be forgotten that the first focus of

Nostra Aetate was towards the Jewish world, which which Saint John XXIII intended to re-establish the original relationship. For the first time in the history of the Church, a doctrinal treatise on the Jewish roots of Christianity was to take shape, which on a biblical and theological level would represent a point of no return. A “bond ... spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock. Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets” (Nostra Aetate, 4). In this way, the Church, “mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” (*ibid.*). Since then, all my

predecessors have condemned anti-Semitism with clear words. And so I too confirm that the Church does not tolerate anti-Semitism and fights against it, on the basis of the Gospel itself.

Today we can look with gratitude at everything that has been achieved in Jewish-Catholic dialogue during these six decades. This is due not only to human effort, but to the assistance of our God who, according to Christian conviction, is dialogue itself. We cannot deny that there have been misunderstandings, difficulties and conflicts in this period, but these have never prevented the dialogue from continuing. Even today, we must not allow political circumstances and the injustices of some to divert us from friendship, especially since we have achieved so much so far.

The spirit of Nostra Aetate continues to illuminate the path of the Church. She recognizes that all religions can reflect “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (NA, 2) and seek answers to the great mysteries of human existence, so that dialogue must never be solely intellectual, but profoundly spiritual. The Declaration invites all Catholics – bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful – to involve themselves sincerely in dialogue and in collaboration with the followers of other religions, recognizing and promoting all that is good, true and holy in their traditions (cf. ibid.). This is necessary today in practically every city where, due to human mobility, our spiritual and cultural differences are called to encounter one another and to live together fraternally. Nostra Aetate reminds us that true dialogue is rooted in love, the only foundation of peace, justice and reconciliation, whereas it firmly rejects every form

of discrimination or persecution, affirming the equal dignity of every human being (cf. NA, 5).

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, sixty years after Nostra Aetate, we can ask ourselves: what can we do together? The answer is simple: we can act together. More than ever, our world needs our unity, our friendship and our collaboration. Each one of our religions can contribute to alleviating human suffering and taking care of our common home, our planet Earth. Our respective traditions teach truth, compassion, reconciliation, justice and peace. We must reaffirm service to humanity, at all times. Together, we must be vigilant against the abuse of the name of God, of religion, and of dialogue itself, as well as against the dangers posed by religious fundamentalism and extremism. We must also face the responsible development of artificial intelligence

because, if conceived as an alternative to humans, it can gravely violate their infinite dignity and neutralize their fundamental responsibilities. Our traditions have an immense contribution to make to the humanization of technology and therefore to inspire its regulation, to protect fundamental human rights.

As we all know, our religions teach that peace begins in the human heart. In this regard, religion can play a fundamental role. We must restore hope to our personal lives, our families, our neighbourhoods, our schools, our villages, our countries and our world. This hope is based on our religious convictions, on the conviction that a new world is possible.

Sixty years ago, *Nostra Aetate* brought hope to the world after the Second World War. Today we are called upon to rekindle that hope in

our world, devastated by war and our degraded natural environment. Let us collaborate, because if we are united, everything is possible. Let us ensure that nothing divides us. And in this spirit, I would like to express once more my gratitude for your presence and your friendship. Let us transmit this spirit of friendship and collaboration to the future generation too, because it is the true pillar on which dialogue rests.

And now, let us pause a moment in silent prayer: prayer has the power to transform our attitudes, our thoughts, our words and our actions.
