

Archbishop says he will speak to Bush about Sermon

JERUSALEM - A Catholic archbishop scheduled to accompany U.S. President George W. Bush on a tour of the Mount of Beatitudes said he would talk to him about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Melkite Archbishop Elias Chacour of Akko, Israel, said since the holy sites do not speak the importance of the sites must be conveyed by the person introducing them to Bush.

Bush, who arrived in the Holy Land Jan. 9 to discuss peace with Palestinian and Israeli political leaders, was scheduled to visit the ruins at Capernaum, Israel, and the Mount of Beatitudes Jan. 11, the last day of his trip. Both sites were to be closed the entire day.

At the Mount of Beatitudes, one of the Franciscan sisters who run the site and Auxiliary Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo of Nazareth will accompany Bush. Archbishop Chacour was to address the president.

Archbishop Chacour, known for his outspokenness, said he felt Bush was trying "to find a way out" of the failures in his Mideast policy and that his visit was a little too late to accomplish anything given his past history and the short time left of his term.

"The sermon was calling for action in a certain direction," the archbishop said in a telephone interview with Catholic News Service. "This is where Christ was calling on all his followers to get up and do something to get their hands dirty, protect the poor, heal the sick, release the prisoners - including those in Guantanamo Bay, and I will tell him that."

Depending on the conditions, Archbishop Chacour said he may also speak to Bush about the “blood on his hands.”

“I think that if he knew how many people have been killed because of his policies (here, in Iraq and in Afghanistan) he would be very sad,” the archbishop said, adding that he “would not hurt his feelings.”

“That would not be polite to do,” he added.

He said the main message he wanted to convey to the president was the almost 150,000 Christians living in Israel who were “expecting to see some action from him.”

Franciscan Father Athanasius Macora of the Christian Information Center and a spokesman for the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, which cares for the holy sites, said the Franciscans were trying to facilitate Bush’s visits as much as possible, “but there are no real preparations on our part.”

“All the preparations have to do with security - even a fly won’t be able to get through,” he said.

He said American and Israeli security officials were choreographing Bush’s visit, including who will approach the president and where he will walk.

The status of Bush’s rumored visits to the West Bank cities of Jericho and Bethlehem were still unknown Jan. 9. Bethlehem Mayor Victor Batarseh and Franciscan Father Marwan Dides, the parish priest at St. Catherine Church, adjacent to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, said they had not been contacted about final plans for the visit, rumored to occur Jan. 10.

“We will only know at the last moment,” said Batarseh. “He is coming just for the

Church of the Nativity.”