

Bishop Madden blogs: Palestinians will know people care

By Bishop Denis Madden

Pope Francis will be the fourth pope in the last 50 years to make this historic pilgrimage to the Palestinian people. What adds to the excitement and great anticipation of this trip is realizing that two of the popes are alive, one has just recently been declared a saint and another is about to be declared blessed.

Like his predecessor St. John Paul II, Pope Francis will include among the sites he will visit the Deheishe Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. There he will see firsthand the plight of those Palestinians who still inhabit refugee camps in the West Bank and in Gaza, in other words within their own territories. I worked in this camp, helping to establish a library and dental clinic while working for the Pontifical Mission for Palestine and can only imagine how the people there will treasure this visit by Pope Francis.

I think Pope Francis will also be moved by the warm Palestinian welcome that he will receive even in a refugee camp. The visit to Deheishe, where the overwhelming numbers of inhabitants are Muslim, and the meeting with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem will surely help greatly the relations between Christians and Muslims.

The Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem has been designated as the place with the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew will meet commemorating that historic meeting in 1964 of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, the then spiritual leader of Greek Orthodox Christians. This meeting will enhance the already warm relations between Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch and will help improve relations of Christians worldwide.

As he does on all of his trips, Pope Francis will carry with him a message of love, brotherhood, peace, and concern for all, especially the poor. The pope comes to a region torn by strife not only between the various communities but even within these communities. His very presence will say to all, "we really don't have to live this way."

Many times Christian Palestinians living in the Holy Land feel like a minority within a minority and ask if people outside their country, especially other Christians, really know or care about the lives of Palestinians in the Holy Land.

This visit of Pope Francis will answer that question loudly and clearly. He will convey as only he can that feeling of hope and encouragement to keep living good lives in this Holy Land where you never have been and never will be alone.

I doubt the Palestinians are looking for any grand breakthrough in the stalled Middle

East negotiations, but they are looking for a visit from their father at a time when hope seems to be escaping their grasp.

The Pope's visit will not only give hope to the Palestinians but hope to the Israelis and all people who truly seek the Peace of Jerusalem.



Bishop Denis Madden is an auxiliary bishop of Baltimore and chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He lived for nine years in the Holy Land.

This blog was originally posted by the USCCB.

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