

On plane to Rome, pope says he found desire for peace in Holy Land

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO ROME – Flying back to Rome after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Pope Benedict XVI offered an instant analysis of his eight-day trip.

He told reporters aboard his El Al chartered jet May 15 that the visit to Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories took him to the roots of Christianity and left him with three major impressions.

The first, he said, was that he found among Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders a strong desire for cooperation and dialogue – not as something motivated by political circumstances but seen as a demand of the common faith in God.

“To believe in the one God who created all of us ... and to believe that God is love and wants love to be the dominant force in the world implies this necessity of dialogue and collaboration,” he said.

The pope said he also found a very encouraging ecumenical climate on his stops in the Holy Land, where a multitude of Christian communities live.

The third impression, he said, was a yearning for peace.

“There are great problems, and we have seen them and heard about them. But I also saw a profound desire for peace on the part of everyone,” the pope said.

“The problems are more visible, and we shouldn’t hide them. They need to be cleared up. But the common desire for peace and fraternity is not as visible, and I think we need to talk about this and encourage the effort to find solutions,” he said.

The pope said he hoped his pilgrimage would inspire many others to follow in his footsteps to the Holy Land, and thus become “messengers of peace” themselves.