

Text of Pope Benedict's greetings to Jewish leaders in Washington

WASHINGTON - Here is the text of Pope Benedict XVI's greetings to the Jewish community for Passover (Pesach); his remarks were read at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center April 17.

My dear friends,

I extend special greetings of peace to the Jewish community in the United States and throughout the world as you prepare to celebrate the annual feast of Pesach. My visit to this country has coincided with this feast, allowing me to meet with you personally and to assure you of my prayers as you recall the signs and wonders God performed in liberating his chosen people. Motivated by our common spiritual heritage, I am pleased to entrust to you this message as a testimony to our hope centered on the Almighty and his mercy.

To the Jewish community on the feast of Pesach,

My visit to the United States offers me the occasion to extend a warm and heartfelt greeting to my Jewish brothers and sisters in this country and throughout the world. A greeting that is all the more spiritually intense because the great feast of Pesach is approaching. "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever" (Ex 12:14). While the Christian celebration of Easter differs in many ways from your celebration of Pesach, we understand and experience it in continuation with the biblical narrative of the mighty works which the Lord accomplished for his people.

At this time of your most solemn celebration, I feel particularly close, precisely because of what "Nostra Aetate" calls Christians to remember always: that the church "received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy concluded the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which

have been grafted the wild shoots, the gentiles" ("Nostra Aetate," 4). In addressing myself to you I wish to reaffirm the Second Vatican Council's teaching on Catholic-Jewish relations and reiterate the church's commitment to the dialogue that in the past 40 years has fundamentally changed our relationship for the better.

Because of that growth in trust and friendship, Christians and Jews can rejoice together in the deep spiritual ethos of the Passover, a memorial ("zikkaron") of freedom and redemption. Each year, when we listen to the Passover story we return to that blessed night of liberation. This holy time of the year should be a call to both our communities to pursue justice, mercy, solidarity with the stranger in the land, with the widow and orphan, as Moses commanded: "But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this" (Dt 24:18).

At the Passover seder you recall the holy patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the holy women of Israel, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael and Leah, the beginning of the long line of sons and daughters of the covenant. With the passing of time the covenant assumes an ever more universal value as the promise made to Abraham takes form: "I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ... All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you" (Gn 12:2-3).

Indeed, according to the prophet Isaiah, the hope of redemption extends to the whole of humanity: "Many peoples will come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'" (Is 2:3). Within this eschatological horizon is offered a real prospect of universal brotherhood on the path of justice and peace, preparing the way of the Lord (cf. Is 62:10).

Christians and Jews share this hope; we are in fact, as the prophets say, "prisoners of hope" (Zec 9:12). This bond permits us Christians to celebrate alongside you, though in our own way, the passover of Christ's death and resurrection, which we see as inseparable from your own, for Jesus himself said, "Salvation is from the Jews" (Jn 4:22). Our Easter and your Pesach, while distinct and different, unite us in our common hope centered on God and his mercy. They urge us to cooperate with each other and with all men and women of good will to make this a better world for

all as we await the fulfillment of God's promises.

With respect and friendship, I therefore ask the Jewish community to accept my Pesach greeting in a spirit of openness to the real possibilities of cooperation which we see before us as we contemplate the urgent needs of our world and as we look with compassion upon the sufferings of millions of our brothers and sisters everywhere. Naturally, our shared hope for peace in the world embraces the Middle East and the Holy Land in particular. May the memory of God's mercies, which Jews and Christians celebrate at this festive time, inspire all those responsible for the future of that region - where the events surrounding God's revelation actually took place - to new efforts, and especially to new attitudes and a new purification of hearts!

In my heart I repeat with you the psalm of the paschal "Hallel" (Ps 118:1-4), invoking abundant divine blessings upon you: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever. Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures forever.' ... Let those who fear the Lord say, 'His steadfast love endures forever.'"

From the Vatican, April 14, 2008