

DEAR FRIENDS

I offer you a warm welcome and thank you for your presence here. I am grateful for the noble aim that brings you here: to reflect together, from varying points of view, on the responsibility of States, institutions and individuals in the struggle against anti-Semitism and crimes associated with anti-Semitic hatred. I would like to emphasize one word: responsibility. We are responsible when we are able to respond. It is not merely a question of analyzing the causes of violence and refuting their perverse reasoning, but of being actively prepared to respond to them. Thus, the enemy against which we fight is not only hatred in all of its forms, but even more fundamentally, indifference; for it is indifference that paralyzes and impedes us from doing what is right even when we know that it is right.



I do not grow tired of repeating that indifference is a virus that is dangerously contagious in our time, a time when we are ever more connected with others, but are increasingly less attentive to others. And yet the global context should help us understand that none of us is an island and none will have a future of peace without one that is worthy for all. The Book of Genesis helps us to understand that indifference is an insidious evil crouching at man's door (cf. *Gen 4:7*). It is the subject of debate between the creature and his Creator at the beginning of history, as soon as the Creator asks Cain: "Where is your brother?" But Cain, who has just killed his brother, does not reply to the question, does not explain "where". On the contrary, he protests that he is autonomous: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9). His brother does not interest him: here is the root of perversity, the root of death that produces desperation and silence. I recall the roar of the deafening silence I sensed two years ago in Auschwitz-Birkenau: a disturbing silence that leaves space only for tears, for prayer and for the begging of forgiveness.

Faced with the virus of indifference, the root of hatred, what vaccine can we administer? The Book of Deuteronomy comes to our aid. After a long journey through the desert, Moses addressed a basic counsel to the Chosen People: "Remember your whole journey" (*Deut 8:2*). To the people longing for the promised future, wisdom was suggesting one look back, turning one's glance to the steps already completed. And Moses did not simply say, "think of the journey", but *remember*, or *bring alive*; do not let the past die. *Remember*, that is, "return with your heart": do not only form the memory in your mind, but in the depths of your soul, with your whole being. And do not form a memory only of what you like, but of "your whole journey". We have just celebrated International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In order to recover our humanity, to recover our human understanding of reality and to overcome so many deplorable forms of apathy towards our neighbour, we need this memory, this capacity to *involve ourselves together in remembering*. Memory is the key to accessing the future, and it is our responsibility to hand it on in a dignified way to young generations.

In this regard, I would like to mention a document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, whose twentieth anniversary of publication we celebrate this year. The title is eloquent: *We Remember: a Reflection on the Shoah* (16 March 1998). It was Saint John Paul II's fervent hope that it "would enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible" (*Letter*, 12 March 1998). The text speaks of this memory, which we Christians are called to safeguard, together with our elder Jewish brothers: "However, it is not only a

question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for ‘there is no future without memory’. History itself is *memoria futuri*” (*We Remember*, I).

To build our history, which will either be together or will not be at all, we need a common memory, living and faithful, that should not remain imprisoned in resentment but, though riven by the night of pain, should open up to the hope of a new dawn. The Church desires to extend her hand. She wishes to remember and to walk together. On this journey, “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” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

Dear friends, may we help one another in turn to grow a culture of responsibility, of memory and of closeness, and to establish an alliance against indifference, against every form of indifference. The potentialities of *information* will certainly be of assistance; even more important will be those of *formation*. We need urgently to educate young generations to become actively involved in the struggle against hatred and discrimination, but also in the overcoming of conflicting positions in the past, and never to grow tired of seeking the other. Indeed, to prepare a truly human future, rejecting evil is not enough; we need to build the common good together. I thank you for your commitment in all of these matters. May the Lord of peace accompany you and bless every one of your good intentions. Thank you.

His Holiness, Pope Francis

