



*To the Participants in the
International Prayer Meeting for Peace
Organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio
Berlin, 10-12 September 2023*

Dear brothers and sisters, as Christian leaders, leaders of world religions and civil authorities, you gather this year in Berlin, near the Brandenburg Gate, at the invitation of the Community of Sant'Egidio, which faithfully continues the pilgrimage of prayer and dialogue initiated by Saint John Paul II in Assisi in 1986. The location of your meeting is particularly evocative, for a historic event took place precisely where you are meeting: the fall of the wall that separated the two Germanies. That wall also divided two worlds, Western and Eastern Europe. It fell thanks to several factors, including the courage and prayers of many people. It thus opened up new horizons: freedom for peoples and the reunification of families, but also the hope of a new world peace following the Cold War.

Unfortunately over the years, the promise of such a future was not built on this common hope, but on special interests and mutual mistrust. Thus, instead of tearing down walls, more walls have been erected. And sadly, it is often a short step from wall to trench. Today, war still ravages too many parts of the world. I am thinking of several areas in Africa and the Middle East, but also of many other regions of the planet, including Europe, which is enduring a war in Ukraine. It is a terrible conflict with no end in sight, and which has caused death, injury, pain, exile, and destruction.

Last year I was with you in Rome, at the Colosseum, to pray for peace. We listened to the cry of a peace that has been sullied and trampled upon. On that occasion, I said: "[T]he plea for peace cannot be suppressed: it rises from the hearts of mothers; it is deeply etched on the faces of refugees, displaced families,

the wounded and the dying. And this silent plea rises up to heaven. It has no magic formulas for ending conflict, but it does have the sacred right to implore peace in the name of all those who suffer, and it deserves to be heard. It rightfully summons everyone, beginning with government leaders, to take time and listen, seriously and respectfully. That plea for peace expresses the pain and the horror of war, which is the mother of all poverty” (*Address at the Prayer Meeting for Peace*, 25 October 2022).

We cannot resign ourselves to this scenario. Something more is needed. We need the “audacity of peace”, which is at the heart of your meeting. Realism is not enough, political considerations are not enough, the strategic approaches implemented so far are not enough. More is needed, because war continues. What is called for is the audacity of peace – right now, because too many conflicts have lasted far too long, so much so that some never seem to end. In a world where everything speeds by, only the end to war seems slow. It takes courage to know how to move in another direction, despite obstacles and real difficulties. The audacity of peace is the prophecy required of those who hold the fate of warring countries in their hands, of the international community, of us all. It is especially the case with regard to believing men and women, that they give expression to the cries of mothers and fathers, to the heartbreak of the fallen, and to the futility of destruction, and so denounce the madness of war.

Yes, the audacity of peace challenges believers in a particular way to transform it into prayer, to invoke from heaven what seems impossible on earth. Insistent prayer is the first kind of audacity. In the Gospel, Christ points out

the “need to pray always and not to lose heart” (*Lk* 18:1), saying: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you” (*Lk* 11:9). Let us not be afraid to become *beggars for peace*, joining our sisters and brothers of other religions and all those who do not resign themselves to the inevitability of conflict. I join you in your prayer for an end to war, thanking you from the bottom of my heart for all that you do.

It is indeed necessary to press forward in order to surmount the wall of the impossible, constructed on the apparently irrefutable reasoning arising from the memory of such great sorrow and so many wounds suffered in the past. It is difficult, but not impossible. It is not impossible for believers, who live the audacity of a hopeful prayer. But it must not be impossible for politicians, leaders or diplomats either. Let us continue to pray for peace without losing heart, to knock with a humble and insistent spirit at the ever-open door of God’s heart and at the doors of humankind. Let us ask that ways to peace be opened, especially for beloved and war-torn Ukraine. Let us trust that the Lord always hears the anguished cry of his children. Hear us, Lord!

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 5 September 2023

Francis