

October 11, 2013

From the Vatican Information Service: <http://news.va/>

## **THE POPE TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ROME: DIALOGUE AND ENCOUNTER DERAILED PREJUDICE**

Vatican City, 11 October 2013 (VIS) – “As Bishop of Rome, I feel particularly close to the life of the Jewish community of the Urbe: I know that, with over two thousand years' uninterrupted presence, you may claim to be the most ancient in western Europe”. This morning, with these words, Pope Francis received in audience the Jewish community of Rome, led by the chief rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Rome.

“For many centuries the Jewish community and the Church of Rome have co-existed in this city, with a history that has, as we well know, often been marred with misunderstandings and real injustice”, he continued. “However, by now this history includes, with the help of God, many decades of the development of friendly and brotherly relations. On the Catholic side, the reflection of the Second Vatican Council has certainly contributed to this change in mentality, but a no less important contribution has come from the life and action, on both sides, of wise and generous men, capable of recognising the call of the Lord and of courageously walking new paths of encounter and dialogue”.

The Pope went on to mention the “common tragedy of the war” which, paradoxically, “taught us to walk together”, and he made reference to the 70th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews of Rome on 16 October 1943. On that day, more than a thousand Roman Jews were rounded up and deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland; only sixteen of them returned home. “We remember and pray for the many innocent victims of human barbarism, and for their families. It will also be an occasion to recall the importance of remaining vigilant in order that we do not regress, under any pretext, to any forms of intolerance and anti-Semitism, in Rome and in the rest of the world I have said it before, and I would like to repeat once more: it is a contradiction for a Christian to be anti-Semitic. His roots are in part Jewish. A Christian cannot be anti-Semitic! May anti-Semitism be banished from the heart and the life of every man and woman!” exclaimed Pope Francis.

He continued, “This anniversary also reminds us how the Christian community has known how to reach out to its brothers in difficulty during their darkest hours. We know that many religious institutions, monasteries and indeed the Papal Basilicas, in accordance with the wishes of the Pope, opened their doors to provide a fraternal welcome, and that Christians offered the assistance, great or small, that they were able to give. The great majority were certainly not aware of the need to improve their Christian understanding of Judaism, and perhaps they knew little of the life of the Jewish community. However, they had the courage to do what was, in that moment, the right thing – to protect their brother in danger. I like to underline this aspect, because while it is true that it is important for both sides to deepen their theological reflection through dialogue, it is also true that there exists a vital dialogue, that of everyday experience, that is no less fundamental. Indeed, without this, without a true and concrete culture of encounter, that leads to the forging of genuine relations without prejudices or suspicions, effort in the intellectual field would be of little worth. Again, here, as I often like to emphasise, the People of God have their own insight and intuit the path that God asks them to follow”.

"I hope to contribute, here in Rome, as bishop, to this nearness and friendship, as I received the grace, and it was a grace, of being able to do with the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. Among the many things we have in common there is the testimony to the ten words, the Decalogue, as the solid foundation and source of life also for our societies, disorientated as they are by a relativism that leads us to lose solid and secure points of reference".

"I invoke with you the protection and blessing of the Almighty for this, our joint path of friendship and trust. May He, in his infinite benevolence, concede His peace in our days", concluded the Holy Father.