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## Pope at audience: “The challenge for the entire world is fraternity”

“The challenge for the entire world is fraternity”: the Pope said, summing up the relevance of his 33rd apostolic journey, retracing its steps in today's General Audience live streamed from the private library of the Apostolic Palace. “The Iraqi people have the right to live in peace, they have the right to rediscover the dignity that belongs to them”, Francis said with regard to Iraq’s thousand-year-old religious and cultural roots: “Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization. Historically, Baghdad is a city of primary importance. For centuries, it housed the richest library in the world. And what destroyed it? War.” *“War is always that monster that transforms itself with the change of epochs and continues to devour humanity”*, Francis said, adding *impromptu*: *“who was selling the weapons to the terrorists?”* “But the response to war is not another war; the response to weapons is not other weapons”, the Pope said.

**“The response is fraternity. This is the challenge not only for Iraq. It is the challenge for many regions in conflict and, ultimately, the challenge for the entire world.”**

“Will we be capable of creating fraternity among us? Of building a culture of brothers and sisters? Or will we continue the logic Cain began: war?”, is the Pope’s unscripted question **“Never before has a Pope been in the land of Abraham”**, Francis said in his opening remarks: “Providence willed that this should happen now, as a sign of hope, after years of war and terrorism, and during a severe pandemic.” “My soul is filled with gratitude”, the Pope said: “in the past few days, the Lord allowed me to visit Iraq, carrying out a project of Saint John Paul II.” “I strongly felt a penitential sense regarding this pilgrimage”, Francis said, describing the closed-door meeting with Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani as “an unforgettable meeting.” “I could not draw near to that tortured people, to that martyr-Church – he said - without taking upon myself, in the name of the Catholic Church, the cross they have been carrying for years; a huge cross, like the one placed at the entrance of Qaraqosh. I felt it particularly seeing the wounds still open from the destruction, and even more so when meeting and hearing the testimony of those who survived the violence, persecution, exile... And at the same time, I saw around me the joy of welcoming Christ’s messenger; I saw the hope of being open to a horizon of peace and fraternity. I found this hope in the discourse of the President of the Republic. I discovered it again in the many greetings and testimonies, in the hymns and gestures of the people. I read it on the luminous faces of the young people and in the vivacious eyes of the elderly.” And under the banner of fraternity, Francis said mentioning the inter-religious meeting, “we met and we prayed with Christians and Muslims, with representatives of other religions, in Ur, where Abraham received God’s call about four thousand years ago.”

**“Please, let us continue to pray for them, our sorely tried brothers and sisters, so they might have the strength to start over”**,

is the exhortation in the framework of the ecclesial meeting in the Syriac Catholic church of Baghdad where 48 people were massacred in 2010 during Holy Mass, among them two priests. **“The Church in Iraq is a martyr-Church.** And in that church that bears an inscription in stone the memory of those martyrs, joy resounded in that encounter”, the Pope’s snapshot: “My amazement at being in their midst mingled with their joy at having the Pope among them.” We launched a message of fraternity from Mosul and from Qaraqosh”, the Pope said. **“The ISIS occupation caused thousands and thousands of inhabitants to flee**, among them many Christians of a variety of confessions and other persecuted minorities, especially the Yazidi. The ancient identity of these cities has been ruined.” “Now they are trying hard to rebuild”, the emphasis of the Holy Father: “The Muslims are inviting the Christians to return and together they are restoring churches and mosques. Fraternity is there.”

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**“Thinking of the many Iraqis who have emigrated, I want to say to them: you have left everything, like Abraham; like him, keep the faith and hope. Be weavers of friendship and of fraternity wherever you are. And if you can, return!”**,

is Francis' final appeal linked to the two Eucharistic celebrations: in Baghdad, in the Chaldean rite, and in Erbil. “let us praise God for this historic Visit and let us continue to pray for that land and for the Middle East”, the invitation: “In Iraq, despite the roar of destruction and weapons, the palm, a symbol of the country and of its hope, has continued to grow and bear fruit. So it is for fraternity: like the fruit of the palm, it does not make noise, but the palm is fruitful and grows. who is peace, grant a future of fraternity to Iraq, the Middle East and the entire world!

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