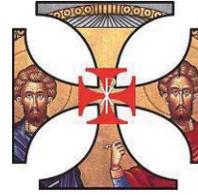




REFLECTIONS FROM THE POPE'S VISIT

Maria Logus
National Philoptochos President



In the midst of the sometimes frenzied euphoria surrounding the recent visit of Pope Francis to the United States, there was a brief moment of profound calm in a moving gathering of the faith community at the 911 Museum at Ground Zero, a place where unconscionable evil attempted to prevail – and failed.

Set in the Museum's soaring Foundation Hall, the inter-religious program, titled "A Witness to Peace," brought together representatives of the Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist communities, to offer reflections on peace. With one of the surviving World Trade Center retaining walls behind him, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios spoke for the Christian faith and, in the original Greek, read from the Book of Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In his address to the gathering, Pope Francis said Ground Zero was a place where "we shed tears" for the victims of "a mindset which knows only violence, hatred and revenge." He continued, calling Ground Zero a place where "we weep out of a sense of helplessness in the face of injustice, murder and the failure to settle conflicts through dialogue."

Pope Francis said he hoped the presence of leaders of so many faiths and traditions would serve as evidence of their shared desire for reconciliation in this community and throughout the world. The Holy Father urged us to continue those efforts, saying "we can and must build unity on the basis of our diversity of languages, cultures and religions. Together," he continued, "we are called to say 'no' to every attempt to impose uniformity and 'yes' to a diversity accepted and reconciled." The Pope cautioned however, that our ability to do so relied on removing all feelings of hatred, vengeance and resentment from our hearts.

The program closed with the Young People's Chorus of New York City's offering of "Let There be Peace on Earth" and the audience's exchange of the Sign of Peace. In the quiet of the darkened hall, with young adults, clothed in scarves of many colors, singing of perfect harmony and peace eternally, there was a deeper appreciation of the urgency of tolerance for all and a palpable sense of hopefulness. In a time when faith is often challenged and abused, we were one community, joined in prayer and love.