

Pope marks Easter by calling for world peace

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II commemorated Christ's suffering, death and resurrection with calls for peace in the world, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"Leaders of nations, men and women of good will, with my heart overflowing with sorrow, I appeal once more to each one of you: stop this war," he said in his Easter address.

On the day Christians celebrate Christ's victory over death, the church cannot be silent about the "violence, anguish and despair" afflicting humanity, the 72-year-old pontiff said in his noon message "urbi et orbi" (to the city and to the world).

The papal Holy Week and Easter celebrations included several references to the war in the Balkans. A collection to aid the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina was taken up during his April 8 Mass of the Lord's Supper. At the April 10 Easter Vigil in St. Peter's

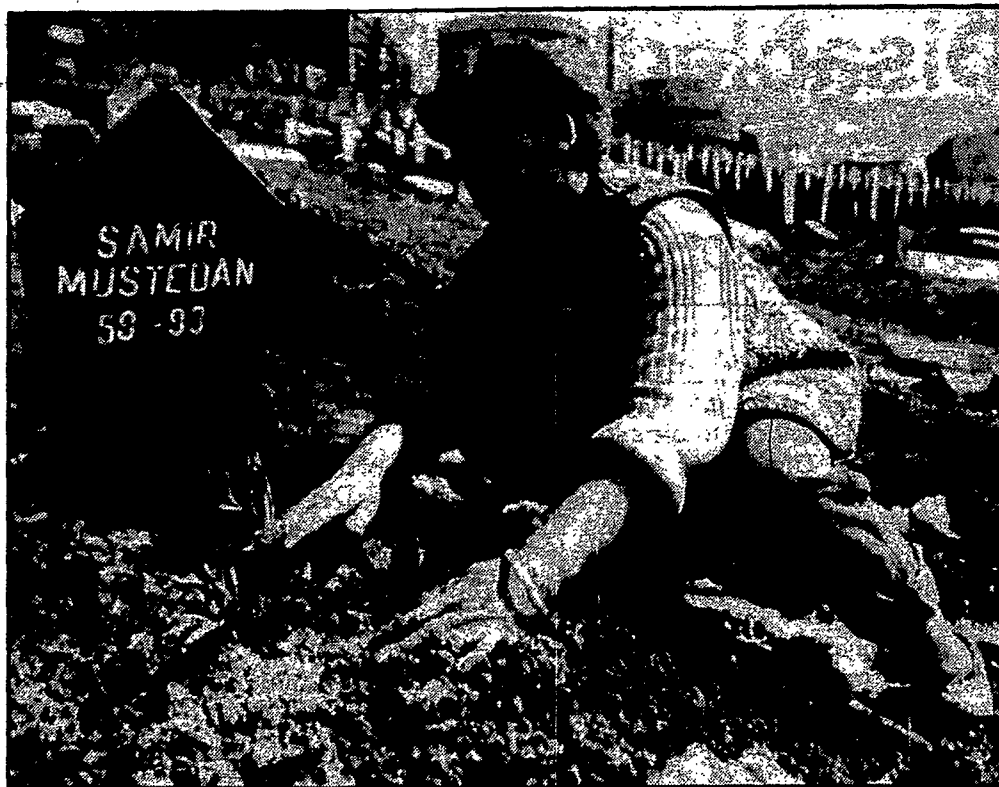
Basilica, the pope lighted one of the paschal candles he had reserved for the bishops of the former Yugoslavia.

"How can we keep silent today — the day of peace — before the fratricidal struggles causing bloodshed in the region of the Caucasus, before the atrocious drama being relentlessly played out in Bosnia-Herzegovina?" the pope asked during his globally televised Easter address from the balcony of the basilica.

He said the fighting "humiliates Europe and seriously compromises the future of peace."

In proclaiming the Resurrection, he said the church prays that the entire human family will take hope from Christ's triumph over death.

His Easter message also called attention to African nations "which feel frustrated in their aspirations to peace — such as Angola, Rwanda and Somalia — or which are moving, amid a thousand difficulties toward the goals of democracy and harmony, such as Togo and Zaire."



AP/Wide World Photos
Taking advantage of the spring weather and a temporary cease-fire at a Sarajevo cemetery April 4, Ajsa Mustedan plants flowers on the grave of her brother who was killed while fighting in the Bosnian Army this year.

From Christ's empty tomb, the pope said, springs forth the life which overcomes the forces of death and gives Christians the strength to confront threats to life.

"Believers cannot but act with courage and commitment wherever there is poverty, hunger, injustice, wherever life is threatened from its beginning to its natural end, wherever life is despised and scorned," he said.

The pope, speaking to an estimated 100,000 people in St. Peter's Square and to television viewers throughout the world, read short Easter greetings in 57 languages, including a special thanks to the people of the Netherlands who sent the tulips, lilies and other flowers that blanketed the area around the altar.

To English speakers he wished: "A blessed Easter in the joy of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and savior of the world."

To Italians, whose nation is going through political and economic difficulties and scandals, the pope encouraged a reliance on traditional Catholic values to get the country back on track.

"My heartfelt hope is that the clouds hanging over (Italy) today soon will be dissipated thanks to a committed agreement by the entire population," inspired by Christian principles, he said.

The evening before, at the Easter Vigil, the pope prayed that all would find "a rebirth in the Spirit and in the newness of life in Christ who died and rose for us."

Pope John Paul's special prayers went to the 14 male and 18 female catechumens who received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist from him during the late night liturgy.

The youngest in the group was a 9-year-old Korean girl; the oldest was a 47-year-old Frenchman. The catechumens also came from Albania, Bosnia, Cambodia, Japan, Nigeria, Thailand, Singapore, Switzerland, the United States and Vietnam.

The Vatican identified the U.S. catechumens as Catherine C. Caporale, 24, and Tina M. Walker, 19. No information was immediately available on their home towns.

"Together with believers throughout the world, let us praise the Creator who willed that there be diversity in the faces of the human race," the pope said in his homily before receiving the catechumens into the church.

Suffering and oppression in the world also received the pope's atten-

tion Good Friday as he led a torch-lighted Way of the Cross at Rome's Colosseum.

Recalling the early Roman martyrs, the pope said such supreme sacrifices continue.

"Our own century, too, — this 20th century — has known the bitter experience of religious persecution in the modern 'Colosseums' of Europe and the world, in the East and in the West," he said.

In the Way of the Cross, the meditations on each of the stations recalled Jesus' mother and the other women who stood by Jesus when it seemed all hope was lost, and highlighted the world's current need for the same compassion and perseverance.

The Vatican's introduction to the stations said, "As if making visible and tangible the face of divine compassion, it is woman who is to be found on the paths of our time, as along the way to Calvary."

The meditations were written by Benedictine Abbess Anna Maria Canopi, a former university professor who now leads the Mater Ecclesiae Abbey in Isola San Giulio, Italy.

The abbess told Vatican Radio April 9 that her reflections focus on the lack of a "true sense of life" and a misunderstanding about the real meaning of love in the modern world.

"The suffering of Christ, in which Mary participated and in which women of every age have participated, is the suffering to give life," she said.

The meditation for the fourth station — Jesus meets his mother — included a prayer that no one who suffers would lack "the heart of a watchful and compassionate mother."

The sixth station — Veronica wipes the face of Jesus — focused on the woman's courage and tenderness before the disfigured Jesus.

"May woman be, now and forever, O Lord, a treasury of grace and goodness, a sacred icon from which shines forth your divine, consoling beauty," the meditation said.

At noon on Good Friday, the pope went into St. Peter's Basilica and took his place in one of the church's many confessionals. During the hour he was there, the pope heard the confessions of and offered absolution to 12 people from Poland, Italy, Ghana, the United States, Germany, Japan and Spain.

In the evening April 11, the pope joined more than 4,000 students from 500 universities in 53 countries for an evening of prayer and music marking the end of the Univ-Congress, a gathering of young people associated with Opus Dei.

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