

WORLD & NATION

Pope calls for binding of wounds in Latin America

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

CARACAS, Venezuela — To Latin American countries lacerated by civil war and social injustice, Pope John Paul II offered advice for binding wounds and reuniting people.

During his Feb. 5-11 trip, Pope John Paul praised Latin America's progress toward lasting peace, but insisted the process could be completed only with a conversion to solidarity and respect for human rights.

True conversion to Jesus and faith in his victory over death must fill the region's people with strength to follow the path of peace and justice, he said.

"The message of my visits is always the Gospel, which is good news, but there are also reproaches, strong words, proclamations and counsels," the pope said on the airplane as he began his four-nation trip.

Civil war has become mainly a memory and a history lesson for the region's people, but the poverty and social injustice which contributed to decades of death still linger.

Visiting Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Venezuela, the pope said that without a changed approach to economics, politics and human rights, Catholics would not live up to the demands of their faith and could not guarantee peace and prosperity for their children.

True peace, he said in Guatemala, "is a gift of God and the fruit of dialogue, a spirit of reconciliation, a serious commitment to holistic development along with solidarity reaching all sectors of society and, in a particular way, of respect for the dignity of every person."

Guatemala is the only Central American nation that has yet to sign a definitive agreement ending its civil war, although President Alvaro Arzu announced peace talks would resume almost immediately.

Pope John Paul traveled by helicopter Feb. 6 to Esquipulas, the Guatemalan town where in 1986 the presidents of



Reuters/Carlos Hernandez
Pope John Paul II talks with prison inmate Richard Padron during a brief stop outside the Retan di Catia Prison in Caracas, Venezuela, Feb. 9. The Pope called on the Venezuelan government to institute prison reforms and promote conditions that respect human dignity.

Central America agreed on a regional plan for ending their civil wars.

The accords were signed in the Basilica of the Holy Christ, a shrine which houses the "Black Christ of Esquipulas," a smoke-darkened crucifix that is the object of popular devotion in Central America.

Visiting the shrine and preaching on the power of Christ's crucifixion, the pope summarized his message to the church in Central America: With the passing of war, church workers must focus more intensely on the spiritual lives of the region's Catholics.

But leaving behind direct confrontations with or active involvement in the area's governments, the church must continue to teach its code of moral and social ethics, the pope said.

Pope John Paul urged people to draw strength from the memory of church workers killed in the region's wars because they took seriously their Christian obligation to serve and defend the poor-

est and weakest members of society.

In Guatemala, where some 30 percent of the population belongs to Protestant churches or evangelical sects, the pope prayed the example of those "heroes of the faith" would encourage people to lead back those who have left the church.

Pope John Paul's message of a need for reconciliation was even stronger in El Salvador, where he prayed at the tombs of the late Archbishops Oscar Romero and Arturo Rivera Damas.

Archbishop Romero was killed in 1980 by members of a military death squad as he celebrated Mass. Archbishop Rivera Damas died in 1994 after years of involvement in the Salvadoran peace process.

"God places before you two roads from which you must choose the future of your nation: the way of death or the way of life," the pope said Feb. 8 during his San Salvador homily.

"Evil is still lurking in many hearts," Pope John Paul said at the Mass. "Sin is the ultimate cause of personal and social disorder, all forms of selfishness and oppression, violence and vengeance."

The pope called on Salvadorans to start a "revolution of love" based on Jesus'

Sermon on the Mount.

The pope had the same message for the people of Nicaragua six years after they voted the Marxist-inspired Sandinistas out of office and ended their civil war.

While the pope rejoiced at the changes, he encouraged Nicaraguans to keep the dignity of the human person at the center of their policies, working for the more equitable distribution of goods and for a political and economic system that would leave no one on the sidelines.

But the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua were not fueled only by the failures of Salvadorans or Nicaraguans, he said.

The poor, he said, suffered due to tensions between the two superpowers.

"In this part of the world," he said in San Salvador, "there was a constant, often violent struggle — with vast strategic importance — between opposing political and economic ideologies such as Marxism and unbridled capitalism." Both, he said, "are foreign to your character and your human and Christian traditions."

In Venezuela — an oil-rich, bustling, developed country — Pope John Paul kept his focus on the need for building a new economy based on solidarity and a new political order where corruption would become a thing of the past.

He began the Feb. 9-11 stop with an address to inmates at Venezuela's most notorious prison.

The pope told the inmates — as he told politicians and business leaders later in the day — to "open your hearts, accept the challenge of conversion."

While the pope did not pretend the prisoners were innocent, he told the political and business leaders that unless the country reformed its economic life and unless ethical values were strengthened, the country's crime rate would continue to grow.

"One should not forget that the process of material impoverishment often brings about moral and spiritual impoverishment," he said.

In Venezuela today, the pope said, there is a "grave crisis because of the absence of values in the fields of ethics, justice, social life and respect for the dignity of the human person."

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Understanding the Language of the Assembly

By Robert A. Healy, AIA

The building blocks of ritual in Catholic worship are similar to the tools used in theater. Text, story, movement, music and order surround the set design. The shape of the space makes certain things possible and other things very difficult. If our worship spaces give the wrong message, they fight the rituals we practice.

Space is the one language in ritual that never stops talking. The hymn you dislike will end; the homily you can no longer bear will end; but the structure of the worship space will continue to send messages. Good space tells who you are and speaks of the relationship between all who are gathered.

The reform of Vatican II finds us among many beautiful buildings that do not assist the message of today's litur-

gy. The great cathedrals, such as Chartres, placed their spatial importance on the elevated sanctuary and all of its grandeur. In such spaces, the assembly became secondary and almost unnecessary to the glory of God.

We need to ask who we are. What is our relationship with God and one another? Churches that we build or renovate need to address who is in charge. Today's worship spaces must celebrate the assembly. Coming together as part of Christ and offering our lives as a living sacrifice is the foundation of the sacramental encounter of Christian experience. For it is together, sharing as a community, that we meet one another, listen, and offer the sacrifice of the liturgy.



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