

Pope celebrates Palm Sunday rite

Peace, youth themes emerge from liturgy

Cindy Wooden/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Celebrating the entry of Christ, king of peace, into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it is impossible not to pray for peace in the city that continues to be marked by violence, Pope John Paul II said.

"And how can we not express fraternal solidarity with your peers tried by war and violence in Iraq, in the Holy Land and in various other parts of the world?" the pope asked young people gathered in St. Peter's Square for the April 13 Mass.

The Mass marked not only Palm Sunday, but also World Youth Day.

At the end of the Mass, young people from Canada, hosts of World Youth Day 2002, passed the World Youth Day cross to young people from Germany, which will host the international gathering of youths with the pope in Cologne in 2005.

The German young people also accepted an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Roman youths, hosts of the 2000 celebration. Pope John Paul has asked that the icon be carried in pilgrimage with the cross in preparation for the 2005 gathering.

Although he looked and sounded strong, the pope again used a new chair with wheels and pneumatic height adjustment, allowing aides to push him behind the altar for the eu-

charistic prayer, which he recited sitting.

In his homily, the pope spoke about the contrasting cries of the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem and then faced crucifixion, "the festive 'Hosanna' and the repeated cry, 'Crucify him.'"

Jerusalem, he said, is "the city of the prophets, many of whom underwent martyrdom for the truth; the city of peace, which in the course of centuries has known violence, war and deportations."

"In some way," the pope said, "Jerusalem can be considered the city symbolic of humanity, especially in the dramatic beginning of the third millennium in which we are living."

The city, like humanity, rejoices on Palm Sunday because "Jesus, the king of peace," has come to bring salvation, the pope said.

Earlier, Palestinian youths, through the Laity Committee in the Holy Land, sent a message delivered by an Italian youth activist to the pope asking for his prayers of peace.

"We pray to God Almighty that he will end the military occupation in our troubled land," the youths wrote. They said their rights as Palestinians have been neglected, and generation after generation has known only oppression and pain.

The Palestinians asked young people and the pope "to pray with us for the peace of Jerusalem, to pray



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Pope John Paul II holds an olive branch during Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square April 13. The pontiff offered prayers for peace in the Holy Land and elsewhere while celebrating Christ's entry into Jerusalem.

with us for justice in the Holy Land, so that the Palestinian people will be set free. We trust in God's word, and we know that we speak the truth, and ultimately it is the truth that sets us free."

Recalling "with encouragement" the pontiff's visit to the Holy Land, they said his presence had been a "healing touch."

Pope John Paul said Christ is the "king of truth, of freedom, of justice and of love," the four pillars essential for the construction of peace as Blessed Pope John XXIII wrote 40 years ago in his encyclical on peace, *Pacem in Terris*.

Pope John Paul asked young people to read and study the encyclical and "try to put it into practice. Then you will be 'blessed' because you will be authentic sons and daughters of the God of peace."

The pope told the young people, "do not be afraid to offer your lives as a total response to Christ. He and he alone changes lives and the history of the world."

During the Mass, the pope also greeted the 240 representatives of 73 bishops' conferences and 41 movements who met in Rome April 10-13 to evaluate the World Youth Day celebrations and to offer suggestions to the German planners of the next international gathering.

Cardinal J. Francis Stafford, pres-

ident of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which is responsible for the gatherings, told reporters, "Young people perceive through World Youth Day that the Catholic Church has placed pastoral ministry to youth as a priority."

Asked at a press conference why so many young people are attracted to "an old man," the 82-year-old pope, Cardinal Stafford said, "The Holy Father, unlike society, gives space to young people."

"They perceive in this 'old man' someone who respects them," he said, as well as trusting that in their search for God, for truth and for love they will succeed.

Cardinal Karl Lehmann of Mainz, president of the German bishops' conference, said that, although there are still about 800 days before the Aug. 15-19, 2005, event, planning is already under way for the celebration of "the faith, solidarity, reconciliation and journey of the young of this world."

Cardinal Joachim Meisner of Cologne said he and the World Youth Day Cologne staff members will meet soon with German Orthodox and Lutheran leaders to explain the event and extend an invitation to their young faithful to participate.

Contributing to this story was Judith Sudilovsky in Jerusalem.

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