

Pool Report: Multi-religious service at National September 11 Memorial and Museum, World Trade Center
September 24, 2015

Pope Francis participated in a solemn multi-faith prayer gathering at the 9/11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan today.

The Pope walked with Cardinal Timothy Dolan and stood for about five minutes of solemn prayer in front of the reflecting pool in the footprint of the World Trade Center towers that fell on September 11, 2001.

The Pope did not greet any members of the crowd.

Joined by former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, the Pope then greeted family members affected by the 9/11 attacks.

The Pope quietly stopped to briefly converse with them and then greeted political and civic leaders including Governor Andrew Cuomo, current Mayor Bill de Blasio and Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor.

At the multi-faith prayer gathering inside the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, the Pope praised the courage of first responders and the spirit of solidarity that pervaded New York after the attacks. "I am full of hope," he said, proclaiming that "reconciliation and unity will prevail over hate and division."

The Pope spoke in Spanish.

He concluded with a litany of sentences beginning with "Paz," Spanish for peace, expressing his hope for interfaith reconciliation and harmony. He ended his address with a request for silent prayer.

Accompanied by Bloomberg, who was mayor when the memorial was constructed, the Pope was shown exhibits from the museum, including the famous beams forged in the shape of a cross that survived, as well as a New Testament with a metal piece emblazoned through it, opened to the verses in which Jesus explains the Great Commandment of love and reconciliation.

The interfaith services included a wide variety of religious voices, each one praying in their own way, including Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist religious leaders among others.

Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove of Park Avenue Synagogue, and Imam Khalid Latif, Muslim chaplain at New York University, put together a joint statement read at the service.

"On this place where horrendous violence was committed falsely in the name of God, we, as representatives of the world religions in the great city of New York, gather to offer words of comfort and prayer," they said.

They declared themselves in solidarity with Pope Francis' injunction that faith leaders should be part of "a field hospital after battle" to heal the wounds of humanity.

The service featured readings from the Quran and the Bible, as well as other religious scriptures.

The few thousand who greeted the Pope at the plaza of the Memorial were invited as representative of the 9/11 community.

Elizabeth Holmes of Brooklyn, who worked at the site in her job with the city's Parks Department after 9/11, described the Pope as "a transformational figure" and a "voice of humanity" as she awaited the Pope's arrival.

Victoria Droumbakis of Staten Island, who lost a cousin at the Towers, said the pope is a symbol of unity. "I am tired of the divisions in this country. We are looking for hope and connection," she said.

Catherine Zagami of Mahopac, NY, waited for the pope as she took a photo of the name etched on the Memorial of her cousin, Michael E. Brennan, a firefighter who perished. "He loved his job, like they all do," she said of her cousin and New York's firefighters.

The prayer service concluded with Cardinal Dolan urging participants to exchange a sign of peace and the singing of "Let There Be Peace on Earth" by the Young People's Choir of New York.

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