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**Closing worship
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem**

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I would like today to speak to you about Jerusalem, a holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims, but a city which is the object of dispute among believers. It is a city hallowed by God, where people continue to fight one another in the name of the same God. It is the city of God, but it is also a city where men and women like you and me live. It is the city of peace that has not yet known peace.

Jerusalem is a city like all the other cities of the world, with its hills, its valleys, its streets and its inhabitants. It is a beautiful city, but in it there are men and women who lack services and are without dignity. The eastern part of the city has been occupied since 1967. Since then, its Arab inhabitants are no longer citizens, but simply “inhabitants” having the right to live in that part of the city, provided they are able to prove that Jerusalem is “the centre of their life and work”; as soon as they move house outside the city boundaries, they lose that privilege. Their presence is merely tolerated. Moreover, Jerusalem is surrounded by a wall dividing the city, which is a real cause of inconvenience for the daily life of its inhabitants.

All the inhabitants of Jerusalem need to feel at home, to live their life in peace, security and dignity, to be able to build houses and send their children daily to school, without worrying whether they will return safe and sound, to worship God in their holy places and places of worship, and to share in the public life of the city.

They are children of the same God and have the same rights and responsibilities.

Jerusalem is the city chosen by God to be the place of God’s self-revelation to humankind. In the Old Testament the prophets were sent to Jerusalem, and the streets of the holy city resounded with their message of salvation. To this day, everything in the city speaks to us of our Saviour’s life, death and rising again. Jerusalem’s streets and holy places speak to us of God’s infinite love for humankind.

Jerusalem has a central place in the events recorded in the Bible. It is a symbolic city, a city where humans meet with God and God meets humans for their salvation.

Sadly, Jerusalem also speaks to us of the history of human rejection of the message of salvation. The prophets were ill treated and their message rejected by its inhabitants. Jeremiah’s message still holds: “O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness so that you may be saved” (Jer. 4:14).

Jerusalem is the city where God has met men and women. God's faithfulness and message of salvation have here come up against human faithlessness and humankind's message of war and exclusion. Jerusalem has a universal calling: "At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will" (Jer. 3:17).

In Jerusalem today there are two peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, and three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Jerusalem is still a city inhabited by men and women who seek God: Jews, who regard Jerusalem as the city of the Most High, Christians, who celebrate their redemption in the holy city, and Muslims, who regard Jerusalem as the city nearest to paradise.

History shows that whenever one people has attempted to dominate the city— whether Byzantines, Fatimids, Crusaders, Ottomans, Jordanians or Israelis—they have excluded others. Today, Arab Christians and Muslims do not have free access to Jerusalem, even as pilgrims. Freedom of worship is not guaranteed for all. The wall divides the city and prevents the faithful from attending their places of worship. Jerusalem is neither a Jewish, nor a Christian, nor a Muslim city. Because of its universal calling it is a city for everyone. If Jerusalem claims to be the city of God, it must be a city for all people, an open city. It is not that today.

Jerusalem is a city full of history and symbolism. To walk through the streets of Jerusalem is like taking a journey through history. This city, destroyed and then rebuilt 28 times, speaks to us of the history of kingdoms, empires, states and the people who have lived there: of the Jebusites, who first built it; of David, who made it a city of peace; of Alexander the Great; of the Romans; of that moment in history when our Lord Jesus, by his life, death and rising again, proclaimed the good news to all nations. There have been the Byzantines, then the Muslims, then the various crusades, and then the Mamelukes, the Ottomans, and so on. Humankind's secular history is here intertwined with God's salvation history. During the last century Jerusalem lived successively under Ottoman domination, the British Mandate, then divided between Jordanians and Israelis, and now under Israeli control.

Jerusalem is a universal city. All believers in God feel that they have a link with it. You could say that we have all been born there. "I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, 'This one was born in Zion.' Indeed of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.' The Lord will write in the register of the peoples, 'This one was born in Zion'." (Psalm 87:4-6).

We all belong to this city. What happens there affects us all. If believers in God are incapable of living in peace in Jerusalem, then they cannot live in peace anywhere. If God's children continue to argue over God's city and kill one another in the name of the same God of mercy, there can be no peace between the religions of the world. Peace begins in Jerusalem and goes out from there to the whole world. If we desire peace for the world and humankind in our day, then let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for all its inhabitants. Armed might cannot give peace, nor can domination, nor can the wall. God is the source of peace. God gives us God's peace, not as the world gives, believing as it does in armed force. God is the Father of us all. When we become God's children and live as God's children, we shall all be brothers and sisters. Our encounter with God gives us salvation. Our encounter with one another as brothers and sisters makes us faithful to God and the message of salvation.

For Jews, Christians and Muslims, Jerusalem is a focus of revelation and of God's encounter with humankind. That is why we cannot remain indifferent to its fate, and we cannot keep silent in face of its present suffering. "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch" (Is. 62:1).