

Francis: The People's Pope!

The Most Reverend James Massa was excited. He was on stage with his mobile calmly giving instructions. His Holiness Pope Francis was addressing the United Nations and would be visiting the 9-11 Museum afterwards. He would meet with friends and relatives of those that were affected in the tragedy and an interfaith service was arranged to mark the occasion.

While Cardinal Timothy Dolan was the public face of the Pope's visit to New York it was the Reverend James Massa and his team that made the events run smoothly.

I was lucky to be invited to the gathering at the Museum and it was a great thrill to mingle with distinguished men and women of the cloth from different religions. There were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Greek Archbishops, Buddhists, and Christians. This was understandable for two reasons: the first is that victims at the World Trade Center were from different nationalities and religions. Secondly, Pope Francis is a believer in Interfaith Dialogue and the gathering provided the ideal opportunity for a multifaith audience to meet under the same roof.

We met in the bowels of the Museum where pictures with burnt edges lay alongside the broken and twisted metal of that infamous day. A column that at one time supported bustling souls now stood lonely with inscriptions and faded photographs. This is the collective memory with which the survivors must live. This is the work of hate.

As Rabbis mixed with Sikhs and Hindus, Christians and Jews and Muslims greeted each other and we knew that this

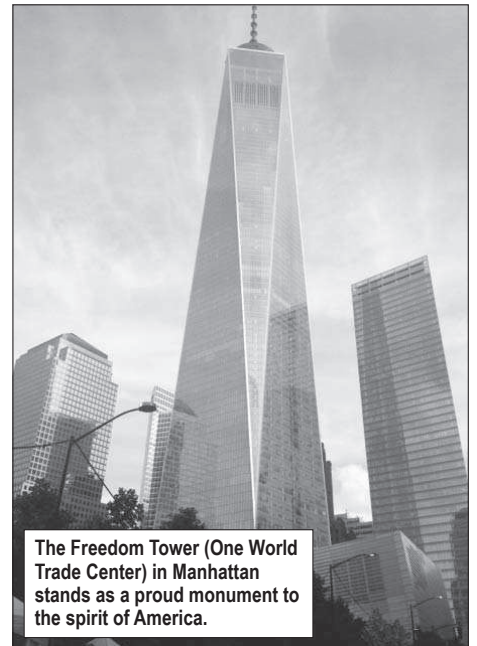
religions.

As with countries he would like religions to be on the path of dialogue. A good religious leader would initiate meetings with other religions and seek common grounds and spaces in which to help heal divisions. The 9/11 tragedy offers leaders the chance to work for the community as the violence of that day did not discriminate between religions or creeds.

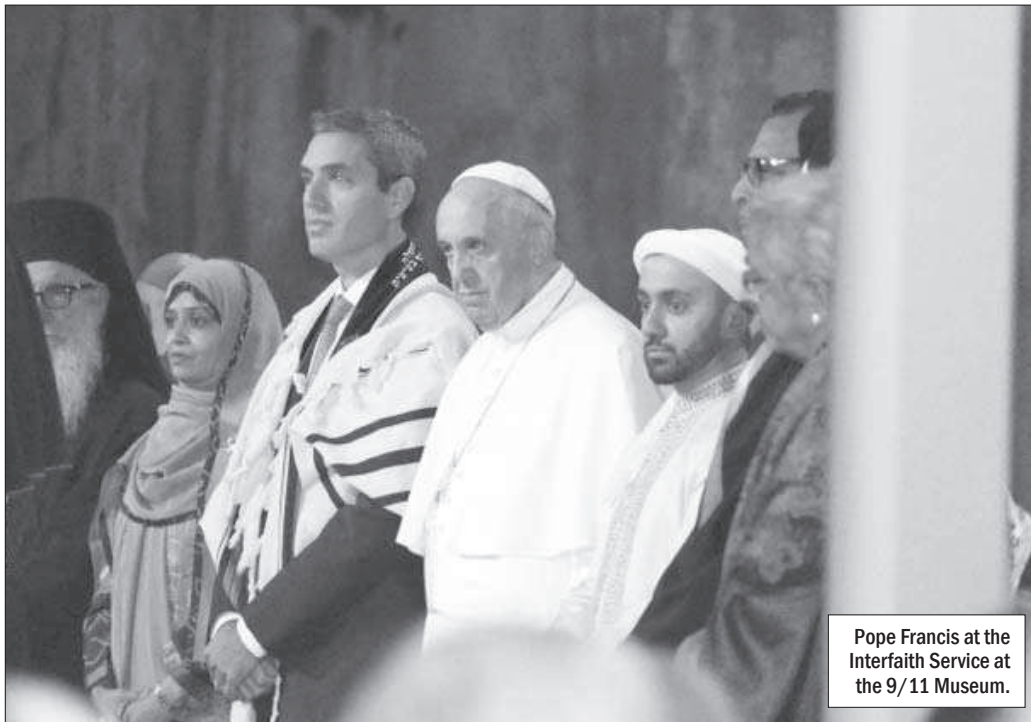
According to Pope Francis, 'in this land the various religious denominations have greatly contributed to building and strengthening society. It is important that today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard, for it is a voice

the words of St. Francis, to become instruments of peace. One speaker said that to build peace we need dialogue and friendship and to respect each other's traditions and to continue the inter-religious dialogue. It was then time for Pope Francis to address the gathering. He began by saying that the water at the empty pit is a reminder that violence, hatred and revenge will get us nowhere. According to Pope Francis, 'this is a place where we shed tears, we weep out of a sense of helplessness in the face of injustice, murder, and the failure to settle conflicts through dialogue.'

But the pontiff also



The Freedom Tower (One World Trade Center) in Manhattan stands as a proud monument to the spirit of America.



Pope Francis at the Interfaith Service at the 9/11 Museum.

Mysorekar, Ishaana Rambachan, Reverend Yasuko Niwano, Bhante Hennbunne Kondanna, Satpal Singh and Gunisha Kaur. They took their seats and for ten minutes there was hushed silence. Then he appeared.

Pope Francis stood at the Memorial and in the solemn flow of the endless watery lake he said a silent prayer and met with families of the victims of the 9/11 tragedy. He then took to the stage and greeted the representatives from the various

of fraternity and love, which try to bring out the best in each person and in each society.' The message here is clear: if religions work together for the common good we will find that the needs of humanity are the same. They will be meeting basic needs and facilitate the pursuit of happiness.

The powerful messages from the gathering called for a healing of the wounds and a warming of the hearts and a coming together to fight violence. There was a call for us, in

offered hope. He called on all to build unity in the face of diversity and for people to uproot feelings of hate and vengeance from their hearts. He recognized the power of multifaith assembly and dialogue. Pope Francis called for 'peace in our homes, our families, our schools and our communities.' This call for peace is universal. It is the bedrock of religions, the common denominator that binds us all.

After his speech at the 9/11 Memorial those

present were asked to hold hands and greet each other in the name of peace. This sent a powerful message among the congregants and the networking that followed should set the stage for dialogue and friendships. Earlier in the day the Pope spoke at the United Nations. It was the fifth time that a Pope had spoken there. When Pope John spoke at the UN in October 1965 he called for peace to guide the destiny of humankind. He said, 'no more war, never

war again.'

He wanted people to be educated in the ways of peace. Pope John appealed to the moral conscience of man to lay down weapons to prevent self-destruction.

In 2015, fifty years after Pope John, the world has changed drastically. There is technology to dazzle the mind and information travels with the touch of a button. But peace has been elusive.

Pope Francis recognized this and addressed a wide-ranging number of issues that are connected to human dignity and the survival of the planet. Peace, for Pope Francis, is not only merely the absence of guns and tanks. It is manifold. It is meeting the basic needs of every person on the planet and there are enough resources to make this possible if the world community wants it to happen.

Where do we go from here? The Pope is not a policymaker but he has raised enough questions to allow those in power to become accountable. He has asked that development take place by placing the welfare of humanity first. This is really the essence of religion.