

Pope in Thailand: Catholics and Buddhists can live as “good neighbours”

On his first full day in Thailand, Pope Francis meets the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch and confirms the Church’s commitment to open and respectful dialogue in the service of peace.

By Vatican News

The meeting took place on Thursday morning at the Wat Ratchabophit Sathit Maha Simaram Temple in Bangkok.

A lasting friendship

In his address to the Pope, the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch Ariyavongsagatanana IX recalled the historic visit of Pope Saint John Paul II to his predecessor 35 years ago, a meeting at which he had been present. The Patriarch went on to list visits made by the Kings of Thailand to the Popes in the Vatican: to Leo XIII in 1897, Pius XI in 1934, and John XIII in 1960. He spoke of a “deep and lasting friendship”, a “coming together within a true spirit of mutual understanding and equal partnership.”

A journey of esteem

In his address to the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch, the Pope confirmed their meeting was taking place “as part of the journey of esteem and mutual recognition initiated by our predecessors.” Recalling the visit of the seventeenth Supreme Patriarch to Pope Paul VI in the Vatican nearly 50 years ago, Pope Francis said he wanted to “follow in their footsteps in order to increase respect but also friendship between our communities.”

A culture of encounter

Pope Francis said these steps “help testify that the culture of encounter is possible, not only within our communities but also in our world, so

prone to creating and spreading conflict and exclusion.” Occasions like this “remind us how important it is for religions to become more and more beacons of hope, as promoters and guarantors of fraternity”, he added.

Catholics in Thailand

Pope Francis expressed his gratitude for the fact that, “since the arrival of Christianity in Thailand some four and a half centuries ago, Catholics have enjoyed freedom in religious practice, despite their being in a minority, and for many years have lived in harmony with their Buddhist brothers and sisters.”

Good neighbours

The Pope reiterated his personal commitment, and that of the whole Church, “to furthering an open and respectful dialogue in the service of the peace and well-being” of the people of Thailand. He said that through scholarly exchanges, “which lead to greater mutual understanding, as well as the exercise of contemplation, mercy and discernment... we can grow and live together as good neighbours.”

Working together

Pope Francis encouraged “the development of new charitable projects”, by members of both religions. These projects should be capable of “generating and multiplying practical initiatives on the path of fraternity, especially with regard to the poor and our much-abused common home”, he said. “In this way, we will contribute to the formation of a culture of compassion, fraternity and encounter”, he concluded, and “this journey will continue to bear fruit in abundance”.

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