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Meeting With Bishops of the Mediterranean in Bari, Italy

Pope Francis

The Catholic communities of every nation on the Mediterranean Sea must work together to promote peace, to aid migrants and refugees, and to defend religious freedom, Pope Francis told bishops from 19 Mediterranean countries. "Amid deep fault lines and economic, religious, confessional and political conflicts, we are called to offer our witness to unity and peace," the pope said Feb. 23 as he joined 60 bishops from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa at the end of a five-day meeting in the southern Italian coastal city of Bari. Pope Francis condemned the "growing atti-

"We can never resign ourselves to the fact that someone who seeks hope by way of the sea can die without receiving help."

tude of indifference and even rejection" of the poor and migrants by "those who, caught up in their own wealth and freedom, are blind to others." The pope continued, "Fear is leading to a sense that we need to defend ourselves against what is depicted in demagogic terms as an invasion" of migrants and refugees. Departing from his prepared text, he said he was frightened by the content and tone of speeches by some political leaders who "sow fear and then hatred" in a way similar to what the Nazis did in the 1930s. "The rhetoric of the clash of civilizations merely serves to justify violence and to nurture hatred," he said. And rather than building institutions that promote equal opportunity and educate everyone to work for the common good, "the international community has been content with military interventions." The pope spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his speech follows, copyright © 2020 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

■ am pleased that we can meet you, and I am grateful that each of you has accepted the invitation of the Italian episcopal conference to take part in this meeting, which assembles the churches of the Mediterranean.

In looking around this church [the Basilica of St. Nicholas], I think of another meeting, our meeting with the heads of the Christian churches, both Orthodox and Catholic, here in Bari. This is the second time in a few months that we have made a gesture of unity of this kind. That earlier meeting was the

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