

**ADDRESS TO PARTICIPANTS IN
A DIGITAL RECEPTION IN RECOGNITION OF RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS
MONSIGNOR GIUSEPPE PLACIDO NICOLINI
HOSTED BY THE COMBAT ANTISEMITISM MOVEMENT
FEBRUARY 21, 2023**

Your Excellencies, esteemed fellow Guests and Speakers, fellow Participants, dear Brothers and Sisters:

I am grateful to Sacha Roytman-Dratwa and the Combat Antisemitism Movement for inviting me to participate in this digital reception celebrating the heroic contributions of Bishop Giuseppe Placido Nicolini to the just cause of saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust. Like the Jewish people, the Catholic Church has a treasured tradition of honoring those members of the faithful throughout the ages who have given themselves in love for their brothers and sisters. They have given themselves because they recognize that the ones in need are fellow children of the same God.

As we have already seen and heard during this program, Bishop Nicolini led his priests and the people of Assisi to welcome the Jewish people into their homes, convents and monasteries. How fitting it was to do this in the hometown of St. Francis, who always looked at others as his brothers and sisters. In the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has written: “In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.” (*FRATELLI TUTTI*, 1)

Father Aldo Brunacci, one of Bishop Nicolini’s priests who served as the head of the Assisi network, remarked after World War II:

“Jews and Christians venerate the same book, the Bible, whose opening chapter reminds us that we were created in God’s image and likeness. God is our Father and we are all brothers and sisters.”
([yadvashem.org /righteous/stories/assisi.html](http://yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/assisi.html))

This is the truth that we honor today, and the truth that we must continue to defend, especially as hatred against Jewish people continues.

There is, in the heart of Christians, a deep honor and respect for the men and women who form the religious family into which Jesus was born, and who are therefore our spiritual mothers and fathers. While it is a grace and a gift to celebrate this family unity – this shared love which comes from the one-same God – we also need the grace that Pope Francis asked for when he visited the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem some years ago:

“Grant us the grace to be ashamed of what we men have done, to be ashamed of this massive idolatry, of having despised and destroyed our own flesh which you formed from the earth, to which you gave life with your own breath of life. Never again, Lord, never again!” (ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS, 26 MAY 2014)

This “never again” comes from the grace of being ashamed of our sins. May God grant that today’s event may help us *never again* to choose violence against our brothers and sisters in the human family – *never again* to turn a blind eye to such violence being enacted in our midst. Not only did Bishop Nicolini not *enact* violence, but he also *acted against* violence by giving refuge and peace to his Jewish brothers and sisters who were threatened.

I will conclude with the same words from the Book of Lamentations that Pope Benedict XVI prayed when he visited Yad Vashem in 2009:

“The favors of the Lord are not exhausted, his mercies are not spent;
They are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness.
My portion is the Lord, says my soul; therefore I will hope in him.
Good is the Lord to the one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him;
It is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.” (LAM. 3: 22-26)

Thank you, and may God bless all of you.