

Pope Francis and Rabbi Skorka are on their way to realizing their dream



Rabbi Abraham Skorka

The Rabbi reflects on his conversation over lunch with the Pope about their dream to pray together at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and at Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem

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“Peace in the Holy Land, and throughout the Middle East, is something that is in the heart of Pope Francis”, Rabbi Abraham Skorka told me on January 17, after he and his wife, Silvia, had lunch together with their old friend from Buenos Aires.

The Argentinean Pope and Rabbi share a dream: “to pray together” both at the Western Wall of the Temple (the Wailing Wall or Kotel in Hebrew), the most sacred site for Jews outside of the Temple Mount itself, and at the birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem, one of the most sacred sites in the world for Christians.

They discussed their dream, and the Pope’s historic “pilgrimage” to Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, May 24-26, over a kosher lunch, in a private room, in the Santa Marta Vatican guesthouse where the Bishop of Rome lives.

“We are on our way to realizing the dream. The details (of the papal trip) have yet to be finalized, but everything is moving ahead in a positive way”, Skorka confided afterwards. Politically it’s not a problem, but quite how all this can be done has yet to be worked out.

In the course of their conversation, they returned to a topic that they had already touched on during his visit here last September, how to give a message of peace to the inhabitants of a region where passions run high and conflicts exist. “We exchanged ideas about how we could give a message of peace, hope and faith to the world in general and, especially, to the Holy Land”, he said.

They talked too about dialogue and Jewish-Catholic relations, and discussed how academic links could be forged between the Rabbinic Seminaries in Latin America and the Pontifical Universities in Rome, beginning with the Jesuit-run Gregorian University, where Skorka,

who is rector of the Latin American rabbinic seminary in Buenos Aires, had given a lecture the previous day.

“I think these are things that should not be hidden, because our idea is to make a contribution to what dialogue means, to what spirituality means, and what the things of the soul mean, as well as the search for God”, he said.

They had engaged in this kind of dialogue over many years in Buenos Aires, and published an interview book together – “On heaven and earth”. Today, however, “there is a difference because my friend is Pope, but we follow through with this commitment, though now at a global level”, Skorka said.

He said he was pleased to see his friend “looking well, serene, relaxed, very concentrated on his agenda, not at all nervous, and very sure of what he’s doing.”

He found him even more affectionate than ever towards Argentines now than he was even before, and one shows he’s missing his homeland through the special attention he gives to all the Argentinians who come to visit him. They saw that clearly the previous day, January 16, when Skorka and several other Argentinean rabbis with their wives met the Pope, had lunch and chatted together for more than two hours during which the Rabbis sang for him. “He was so full of affection and joy”.

Over lunch last Friday, the Rabbi and his wife chatted with Francis about Argentina. “He’s totally informed about the reality of the country”, Skorka observed. Among other things, they discussed how to develop more ways of giving assistance to the needy in Argentina, also in the interior of the country. “Our vision is to give support to Argentinean society”, he added.

His wife Silvia had not met Bergoglio since he left Buenos Aires last February to come to Rome for the conclave. She said she was particularly struck “by the inner peace that he transmits and which he says he feels, above and beyond the enormous responsibility he now has as head of the Catholic Church.”