

Hands

Hands tell a story of their owners. They reach, grasp, soothe, turn away or beckon, and the lined hands of age are also the lined hands of knowledge built up over many years.

In March Pope Francis visited Iraq; the first Pope to set foot in this ancient and troubled country. One image will live long in our memories. On 6 March, the Pope visited Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in the Ayatollah's home in Najaf. He lives in a narrow street, so the arrival was not easy in any sense of the word.

Pope Francis is 84 and the Ayatollah over 90 years old, so there was abundant experience in that meeting. Both had seen their share of pain, made mistakes and had lived their entire lives with God at their heart. They are both deeply respected by the communities they lead. Yet here they were, two who the world would expect to be suspicious of each other, even hostile. The Catholic and Islamic communities have mourned the deaths of many people in Iraq and beyond in the name of faith.

The image that went around the world shows two old men leaning inwards, hopefully to better understand each other. The photograph itself draws the eye to their hands which seem to tell a story of their own. They both hold each other's hands. The hands look nervous. Please God, they are reaching out towards reconciliation and peace. Please God, they are ready to hold each other as conferees.

Only the courageous can grasp these opportunities, take these risks with hands that are wise, that have learned when to hold on and when to let go, when to give and when to ask.



Hands tell a story of their owners.