

Benedict XVI's Reflection on Peace

"Our Lord Has Conquered With a Love Capable of Going to Death"

RHEMES-SAINT-GEORGES, Italy, JULY 25, 2005 (Zenit.org).- Here is a translation of the address Benedict XVI delivered last Sunday during a ceremony for Mideast peace over which he presided in the church of Rhemes-Saint-Georges in the Aosta Valley.

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I only wish to offer some brief words of meditation on the reading we have heard. With the background of the tragic situation of the Middle East, we are moved by the beauty of the vision illustrated by the Apostle Paul (cf. Ephesians 2:13-18): Christ is our peace. He has reconciled one another, Jews and pagans, uniting them in his Body. He has overcome the enmity with his Body, on the cross. With his death, he has overcome the enmity and has united us all in his peace.

However, more than the beauty of this vision, we are impressed by the contrast with the reality that we experience and see. And, initially, we can do no more than ask the Lord: "But, Lord, what is your apostle saying to us: 'They have been reconciled'?" In reality, we see that they are not reconciled. ... There is still war between Christians, Muslims, Jews; and others foment war and all continues full of enmity, of violence. Where is the efficacy of your sacrifice? Where in history is this peace of which your apostle speaks to us?

We men cannot resolve the mystery of history, the mystery of human freedom that says "no" to the peace of God. We cannot resolve the whole mystery of the relationship between God and man, of his action and our response. We must accept the mystery. However, there are elements of response that the Lord offers us.

A first element is that this reconciliation of the Lord, this sacrifice of his, is not without efficacy. There is the great reality of the communion of the universal Church, of all peoples, the network of Eucharistic Communion, which transcends the frontiers of cultures, civilizations, peoples and times.

This communion exists; these "islands of peace" exist in the Body of Christ. They exist. And forces of peace exist in the world. If we look at history, we can see the great saints of charity who have created "oases" of this peace of God in the world, who have again lit their light, and have been able to reconcile and to create peace again. The martyrs exist who suffered with Christ; they have given this witness of peace, of love, which puts a limit to violence.

And, seeing that the reality of peace exists, though the other reality persists, we can reflect further on the message of this Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians. The Lord has conquered on the cross. He has not conquered with a new empire, with a force that is more powerful than others, capable of destroying them; he has not conquered in a human manner, as we imagine, with an empire stronger than the other. He has conquered with a love capable of going to death.

This is God's new way of conquering: He does not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposes violence precisely with the contrary: with love to the end, his cross. This is God's humble way of overcoming: With his love -- and only thus is it possible -- he puts a limit to violence. This is a way of conquering that seems very

slow to us, but it is the true way of overcoming evil, of overcoming violence, and we must trust this divine way of overcoming.

To trust means to enter actively in this divine love, to participate in this endeavor of pacification, to be in line with what the Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, the agents of peace, because they are the sons of God." We must take, in the measure of our possibilities, our love to all those who are suffering, knowing that the Judge of the Last Judgment identifies himself with those who suffer.

Therefore, what we do to those who suffer, we do to the Last Judge of our life. This is important: At this moment we can take his victory to the world, taking part actively in his charity. Today, in a multicultural and multireligious world, many are tempted to say: "For peace in the world, among religions, among cultures, it is better not to speak too much of what is specific to Christianity, that is, of Jesus, of the Church, of the sacraments. Let us be content with what can be more or less common ...."

But it is not true. Precisely at this time, a time of great abuse of the name of God, we have need of the God who overcomes on the cross, who does not conquer with violence, but with his love. Precisely at this time we have need of the Face of Christ to know the true Face of God and so be able to take reconciliation and light to this world. For this reason, together with love, with the message of love, we must also take the testimony of this God, of God's victory, precisely through the nonviolence of his cross.

In this way, we return to the starting point. What we can do is to give witness of love, witness of faith and, above all, to raise a cry to God: We can pray! We are certain that our Father hears the cry of his children. In the Mass, as we prepare for holy Communion, to receive the Body of Christ that unites us, we pray with the Church: "Deliver us, Lord, from all evils, and grant us peace in our days." May this be our prayer at this time: "Deliver us from all evils and give us peace," not tomorrow, or the day after: Lord, give us peace today! Amen.

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