



The Holy See

PRAYER SERVICE AT THE PARISH OF RHÊMES-SAINT GEORGES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Aosta Valley

Sunday, 23 July 2006

I offer you only a few words of meditation on the reading we have just heard. Against the background of the dramatic situation in the Near East, the beauty of the vision described by the Apostle Paul (cf. Eph 2: 13-18) is striking: Christ is our peace. He reconciled one to another, Jews and pagans, uniting them in his Body. In his Body, on the Cross, he overcame animosity. He overcame enmity with his death and united us all in his peace.

Even more, however, than the beauty of this vision, we are struck by the contrast with the reality we are living through and seeing. And to start with, we can do no more than say to the Lord: "But Lord, what is your Apostle telling us: "they are reconciled?"".

We see, in reality, that they are not reconciled.... There is still war between Christians, Muslims and Jews; and others are fomenting the war, and the whole atmosphere is still charged with hostility and violence. Where is the effectiveness of your sacrifice? Where in history is this peace of which your Apostle speaks?

We human beings cannot solve the mystery of history, the mystery of the human freedom to say "no" to God's peace. We cannot solve the whole mystery of the God-man relationship, of his action and our response. We must accept the mystery. Yet, elements of a response, which the Lord gives us, exist.

A first element - this reconciliation of the Lord, his sacrifice - did not remain ineffective. There is the great reality of the communion of the universal Church, of all peoples, and the network of Eucharistic Communion that reaches beyond the boundaries of cultures, civilizations, peoples and

times.

There is this communion and these "islands of peace" in Christ's Body. They exist. And they constitute forces of peace in the world.

If we look at history, we can see the great saints of charity who created "oases" of this peace of God in the world, who have always kindled his light anew and were always better able to reconcile people and create peace. Then there are the martyrs who suffered with Christ and bore this witness of peace and love that curbs violence.

Moreover, by seeing the existence of the reality of peace - even if the other reality has endured - we can more deeply penetrate the message of this Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians.

The Lord was victorious on the Cross. He was not victorious with a new empire, with a force more powerful than the forces of others or able to destroy them; he did not triumph humanly, as we might imagine, with an empire more powerful than that of someone else.

He triumphed with a love that could endure until death. This is the new way in which God triumphed: he did not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposed violence with something quite the opposite: with love to the very end, his Cross.

This is God's humble way to overcome: with his love - and only in this way is it possible - he set a limit to violence. This way of conquering seems very slow to us but it is the true means of overcoming evil and violence, and we must entrust ourselves to this divine means of conquering.

Entrusting ourselves means entering actively into this divine love, taking part in this task of peacemaking, to be in conformity with what the Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (*Mt 5: 9*).

We must reach out with our love, as far as we can, to all the suffering, knowing that the Judge of the Last Judgment identifies with those who are suffering. Therefore, what we do for the suffering we do for the Last Judge of our lives.

This is important: that we can bring his victory to the world at this moment, taking an active part in his charity.

In our multicultural and multireligious world, many are tempted today to say: "For peace in the world among the religions and cultures, it is better not to speak too much about the specificity of Christianity, that is, of Jesus, the Church, the Sacraments. Let us be content with things that can be more or less in common...".

But it is not true. At this very moment - the moment of a widespread abuse of God's Name - we need God who triumphs on the Cross, who does not conquer with violence but with his love. At this very moment we need the Face of Christ in order to know the true Face of God and thus bring reconciliation and light to this world.

Together with love, therefore, with the message of love and with all we can do for the suffering in this world, we must also bring a witness of this God, of the victory of God, precisely through the non-violence of his Cross.

Thus, let us return to our starting point. All we can do is to bear a witness of love, a witness of faith; and especially, raise a cry to God: we can pray! We are sure that our Father hears his children's cry.

At Mass, while we prepare to receive Holy Communion, to receive the Body of Christ who unites us, let us pray with the Church: "Free us, Lord, from every evil, grant us peace in our days!". May this be our prayer at this time: "Free us from every evil and grant us peace!". Not tomorrow nor the day after tomorrow: Lord, give us peace today! Amen.

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