

Online course, OCist, 15-19 April 2024 – Chapters of the Abbot-General

“Seek peace and pursue it” Brotherly life and reconciliation

1. A yeast of peace in the world

It is a paschal joy to be able to meet together using modern technology, for these days of training and to go into depth together on a topic which is always fundamental for us, our vocation and for everyone, for the whole of humanity. For when humanity loses peace, it loses itself and is no longer human.

Working on brotherly life and reconciliation is not only important for the life of our communities but is also a mission the Lord entrusts to the Church, to each Christian community, to every disciple, so “that the world might be saved through Him” (Jn 3:17).

I would like these five Chapters to be a help in examining in depth this topic, vocation and mission. For this reason, they have been translated into the languages of the Order and substitute the Pentecostal Letter which I usually send you. A Pentecost which is always renewed is possible if we offer the Spirit our willingness to be made instruments of Christ’s peace, in the same way that the essential prayer attributed to St. Francis asks for and which we can use at the beginning of this course:

“Oh Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me bring love,
Where there is injury, let me bring pardon,
Where there is discord, let me bring harmony,
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith,
Where there is error, let me bring truth,
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.”

The title of this Course quotes a verse from Psalm 33, mentioned in a passage from the Prologue of the Rule:

«And the Lord, seeking His laborer in the multitude to whom He thus cries out, says again, “Who is the man who will have life, and desires to see good days?” (Ps 33,13) And if, hearing Him, you answer, “I am he,” God says to you, “If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it.” (Ps 33,14-15). And when you have done these things, My eyes shall be upon you and My ears open to your prayers; and before you call upon Me, I will say to you, “Behold, here I am.”

What can be sweeter to us, dear brethren, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.» (RB Prol 14-20)

St. Benedict weaves the verses of Psalm 33 into a dialogue between God who seeks Man and Man who replies. God always returns to look for Adam who has hidden, no longer among the bushes of earthly paradise but among the crowd, the masses. An anonymous and impersonal relationship with us, a relation with the masses, is not enough for God. Rather he seeks a face-to-face with each human, with each heart. How important it is to be conscious of this in the time we live in, where humanity is reduced not only to an anonymous and shapeless crowd but to a crowd artificially connected, united only

virtually and dominated by leaders who seek only an anonymous consensus in numbers, with no encounter and no personal relationship!

How beautiful it is, on the contrary, to see that God, by sending his Son in the world, has come and continues to come and seek us personally, to offer us a personal encounter and relationship. Jesus Christ has come to seek out and save every lost sheep. And when He finds it, He takes it back to its pen, that is, He takes it back with Him to the other sheep, to form a fraternal community around Him. The environment for which God has created us, is not that of an anonymous crowd but that of a fraternal community.

It is important to note immediately that it is the fact that the Lord seeks a personal relationship with every heart, that creates community, a real community between us and also with entire humanity. It is as though, when a single person among the crowd says "I am here!", replying to God who calls him, even the crowd becomes less anonymous, and begins to become a community, to become people of God. It is important to think about this in these times when the Church is becoming a smaller and smaller remnant, but a remnant which the Holy Spirit makes a yeast among the masses. A yeast of what? Of fraternal community, of reconciliation and therefore of real peace.

Recently, I have had the grace to visit Mongolia, invited by Cardinal Giorgio Marengo, to get to know the experience of the Church which is being made in this great country. The Catholic Church has been present for little more than thirty years and numbers about 1500 members. Sixty or so missionaries work there, from every continent and from various Orders and Congregations. What struck me most was that there the small size of the community and its little strength is not experienced as the end of the Church but rather as a seed which is sprouting, conscious that the Kingdom of God is a small mustard seed which God can make very fertile (cf. Mt 13:31-32). Above all, the Kingdom of God is the yeast which receives from the Spirit the capacity to make all the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33). What is important is not so much to be capable of great things, but to cultivate the simple presence of the yeast in the dough. Every contact, every personal relationship is precious and should be cared for, because this is how the yeast can filter into the masses and slowly make the Kingdom of God grow within it.

It is important that wherever we are, and in whatever condition in which we find the Church and the Order, in whatever condition our community is in, we do not forget that it is to this we are all being called. We must not lose time, through pride in being numerous or strong, or through sadness because we are few and weak. Few or many, strong or weak, God only wants us to be the yeast of the Kingdom in the dough of the world.

This is well expressed in a passage from the *Lumen gentium* which brings us back to the theme of unity and peace which we are called to promote:

"So it is that that messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5:13-16).

(...) God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity." (LG §9)