

***"Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God!"***

***"Seek peace and pursue it".***

*Matthew 5,9 & Psalm 34,15*

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*O Lord, our creator,  
you have promised us your Spirit of faithfulness  
to lead us in faithfulness.*

*Open our ears and set our hearts,  
that we may now receive your Word.*

*May it give us peace in our hearts  
and deepen our thirst to advance towards your kingdom.*

*May your word create in us a heart of flesh,  
a heart that is able to love you,  
a heart filled with compassion for the brothers and sisters around us,  
in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN!*

Excelencies, Eminencies,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ  
Dear friends

Thanks to the organisers for offering me the honour of giving a short sermon in the frame of the third european catholic social days.

The period of Lent is a time of voluntary frugality to purge our lives of the many things, pleasant or worrying, that encumber them; a time of chosen sobriety to make room in our hearts and minds for those essentials that are so fundamental to our lives and yet are often relegated to the shadows of our busy and full lives; a time of restraint or abstinence to prepare our inner self to receive the significance for us, for our humanity, for the world, of the passion of Christ and the Gospel of Easter morning.

And now, this year, this time of year dedicated to opening up the space for inner questioning, has been disrupted by the return to European soil of the tragedy of war, of those traumas and devastating effects that we thought belonged to the past, of a wave of human tragedies attested to daily by a flood of images, each more unbearable than the last. The uncertainty is palpable and imposes itself on all minds. The proximity of this war shakes many certainties. Political doctrines, which for decades seemed to be unshakeable certainties, are reconsidered in a few hours, abandoned in favour of contrary options.

Church circles are not spared from this deep questioning and shaking. The Gospel calls us to be agents of reconciliation and peacemakers. But what are the means to promote peace? Diplomatic action, of course! But should we exclude the use of violence in return? Can violence be legitimised?

The psalmist exhorts us, "Seek peace and pursue it". That we may desire peace, that it may be the object of our innermost quest, we can easily understand. That it should be pursued, that it should be chased, raises questions. I share with you four lessons that inspire me in this questioning.

### ***1 Peace is fragile***

The first lesson is that peace is fragile, furtive! What we have just experienced over the last few days amply illustrates this. In Europe, citizens had become accustomed to peace, the peace of the silence of arms. The absence of armed conflict on European soil had become so normal that the founding narrative of the European project was no longer operative. Considering peace as normal and acquired, we have globally abandoned the work of reconciliation, the importance of the understanding of peoples and states, their solidarity, and their cooperation, we did this for the benefit of local issues. In so doing, we forget that the common good and the general interest are also the interest of each individual. Criticism and mistrust of the European Union

prevailed over the interest that this project of an area of peace and freedom represents for the common good. Thus, this project of European integration, which during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had enjoyed unreserved support, has since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century become THE PROBLEM. And now, within a few hours, this European project has once again become THE SOLUTION. We suddenly understand the fragility of peace, the interest of a space of peace and freedom for all human beings, the need for attention and vigilance that it requires.

## ***2 Sustainable peace requires an ongoing effort at reconciliation***

Secondly, when the psalmist invites us to pursue peace, he is giving us to understand that lasting peace requires constant attention, demands a constant effort of reconciliation. We would be wrong to believe that peace can be taken for granted. Moreover, for biblical theology, peace is much more than the mere silence of arms. It is a state of fulfilment and blossoming, both personal and relational. To contribute to peace, it is not only necessary to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, but also to dialogue and work to heal wounded memories. For wounded memories are the seeds of tomorrow's conflicts. This is what the history of the world conflicts of the 20th century teaches us, as well as the present war. A memory wound is a bruised identity produced over time by an untreated humiliation. It turns into a posture of victimhood, persistent resentment, even violence and hatred. The tragedy of a memory wound, writes Olivier Abel, is that "peoples [...] remain humiliated from generation to generation [...], with the terrible time lag that the descendants of the guilty are not really guilty, and do not feel so, whereas the descendants of the victims are still often victims, or feel so. Humiliation [...] is much more serious eventually than outright violence, and this is what poisons violence, when the enemy is held in contempt." In many places on the European continent such a memory wound remains and needs to be healed - in Transylvania, Transcarpathia, Nagorno Karabakh, Serbia, Armenia, but also within European societies. As we know, the common writing of the story of respective wounds allows memories to be healed,

to leave behind postures, whether they be victimising or contemptuous, and thus convert the silence of arms into lasting peace.

### ***3 No peace without justice***

The third lesson is that there is no peace without justice. This is the lesson of the 1989 Basel Ecumenical Assembly. There is no peace without justice, and no justice without care for creation. The Council of European Bishops' Conferences and the Conference of European Churches, in their joint reflections, have identified this demand, whose relevance and prophetic character remain persistently relevant. As Churches, we must be concerned with justice, working constantly to take into account the legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples, particularly in the areas of education, access to health care, access to dignified employment, recognition of fundamental freedoms, protection, security, respect for individual and collective identities, and refusing all forms of discrimination. These third European Catholic Social Days, with their theme "Europe beyond the pandemic: a new beginning. European societies in transition: a Christian contribution to solidarity and social justice" is precisely in this perspective. Ongoing changes challenge the churches, such as secularisation, pluralisation of societies and changing morals. Our Churches and our pastoral work must learn to welcome and accompany the aspirations of our contemporaries, to leave behind a posture that is too asymmetrical, to refrain from any a priori judgement, in order to be legitimate in the ethical questioning that we carry out in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the price of justice in a world that is cracking all over.

### ***4 Peace is given to us***

Fourth teaching. The Gospel reminds us from its very first pages that peace is given to us in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. He whose birth was greeted by the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace for his beloved", at the moment of entering his passion addresses his disciples saying "my peace I leave with you, my peace I give

to you". So, where human hatred and violence undermine peace, let us build on the Gospel message of peace that invites us to trust in God, build on our ability to mobilise for justice and peace. For the message that invites us to trust in God also invites us to believe in this world and in this humanity that God so loved that he gave his son, the prince of peace, for the happiness of the life of all.

## **5 Conclusion**

May the Gospel of peace resonate for each and every one of us and mobilise us. May it bring comfort to wounded and grieving hearts, may it encourage those who are seized by mistrust and suspicion to meet one another, may it pacify our actions and our encounters, and may it strengthen our hope, that hope which Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, resisting Nazism in another dark situation, formulated in a magnificent creed with which I would like to conclude this message.

*I believe that God can and will generate good out of everything, even out of the worst evil. For that, he needs people who allow that everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.*

*I believe that God will give us in each state of emergency as much power of resistance as we need. But he will not give in advance, so that we do not rely on ourselves but on Him alone. Through such faith all anxiety concerning the future should be overcome.*

*I believe that even our mistakes and failings are not in vain, and that it is not more difficult for God to cope with these as with our assumed good deeds.*

*I believe that God is not a timeless fate, but that He waits for and responds to honest prayers and responsible action.*

Amen.

Christian Krieger,  
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