



Peace to you! The Message



During his Urbi et Orbi message on Easter Sunday, in this moment of crisis that is enveloping the world, the Holy Father asked Christ, he who is "our peace", to enlighten everyone who has responsibility for conflicts, "that they may have the courage to support the appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world ". More specifically, with regard to the Holy Land, the Pope hoped that "this be the time when Israelis and Palestinians resume dialogue in order to find a stable and lasting solution that will allow both to live in peace". For its part, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre continues to work concretely and discreetly for peace, as the Pope pointed out in addressing the members of the Grand Magisterium and the Lieutenants on 6 November 2018 on the occasion of the Consulta: "with your commendable commitment, you too offer your contribution to build the path that will lead, as we all hope, to the achievement of peace throughout the region." In fidelity to this service and in the name of this commitment, one week after Easter, on the occasion of Sunday *in Albis*, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Order, invites us to deepen our reflection on the theme of peace which we have been asked to welcome as a gift from God.

Peace to you! Does such well-wishing make sense? Peace assumes a state of military belligerence or psycho-sociological distress. Jesus uses it as the first expression in his encounter with the disciples. He does not use it with Mary Magdalen, whom he calls instead by name. She was stricken by the death and the unjust condemnation imposed on the Master; she was not in crisis with him.

It was different for the disciples: there were those who had denied knowing him, committing perjury, and those who had slipped away in the darkest moment. Confronted with the saddest events, in the end, the questions were, who really Jesus was? Was he the Messiah? Towards his end, why did he meet such an ignominious death? As for his words: did they not seem somewhat nebulous and removed from reality? His works, what to think of them now? In Caesarea Philippi, they had set

themselves apart from the people's opinions: but now? His condemnation and killing: what sense did they have? In short, war was internal.

The disciples needed to be pacified: "Peace to you!" And Jesus showed the signs of his passion, the clear evidence of himself. His was also a greeting, a graceful gesture. And He did not shirk from it. But the formal greeting in itself was not enough; rather the content of it, the tone of voice, the gazing and letting oneself be gazed back into one's eyes, the seizing of a serene facial expression, these yes, were inalienable clear signs to understand who actually stood before them, and most of all, that which he held in his heart.

The face is the transparency of the soul. Even the psalmist had said it: "*Vultum tuum Domine requiram* - Your face, Lord, I seek" (Ps 27:8) wanting to understand the feelings of the Most High.

God also looked at Cain's face and saw that he was in crisis towards him: "Why is your face downcast?" (Gen 4:6), he asked. The true nature of the face, the secret it conceals, lies beyond its appearance. The question, which can both be a plea for help and a threat, always manifests the living presence of the "Other" and, of course, conceals a trace of the infinite (E. Lévinas). In Christ, writes Benedict XVI, "charity in truth becomes the Face of his Person" (*Caritas in veritate* 1).

The risen Jesus does exactly this, as he reveals the Face of his 'Person': he greets the disciples, frightened, locked in the house for fear of the Jews, strayed by the events and by their own behavior. They doubted whether the friendship of the Lord was still intact: Had our ancestors not hidden after betraying the word of the Creator? And was Moses not placed in the hollow of the cliff and covered by the hand of the Most High so as not to see his face when the people, frightened for having betrayed the Covenant, asked him, man of God, to speak to him? Does the child not hide after his disobedience? And does man not also deny the evidence in a court of law?

At the greeting, "*Peace to you!*", they "rejoiced"; the voice of the Risen One was, in fact, reassuring, the hands with the sign of the nails and the pierced side were His very own: Jesus was alive! And this was to them the most important thing: He was really alive! He was not a ghost! Even Thomas wanted to have the same carnal experience of the Risen One and to us Jesus left a beatitude that they, the disciples, could not enjoy: "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" (Jn 20:29).

The Master now needs to recover his friends, to entrust them to continue His mission. To call back everyone, men and women, including those who, leaving Jerusalem, were going to Emmaus disappointed and sad. He will also call Saul, the killer of Stephen, who persecuted Him, for the nascent Church. But they, the Eleven, will be His witnesses, Apostles in the world. Reconciled he sends them to Galilee, where it all began and where they had the memory of the freshness of the early days.

The peace of Christ goes beyond personal disorder to which we often reduce everything, and carries us to draw upon the unique depths and riches of the person of Jesus and his message of salvation; the 'peace' of Christ then is above all a theological fact, and this has relevance in the Church, but, at the same time, also in society and in the political sphere. On the contrary, the gift of the Risen One would be tamed to contingent realities or to subjectivist visions, if not of controversy, inside and outside the Church. 'Peace' is therefore a theological place, because it is a gift from Christ; it is a supernatural gift that helps us to confront ourselves with reality; not the opposite.

At the moment when Jesus wished peace, we, for example, cannot forget that that greeting - "Peace!" - was already in the name of Jerusalem, the holy City he loved intensely and for which he had cried: "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace!" (Lk 19:41). Jesus did not cry for the walls that, sooner or later, would have fallen with time and for the various bloody wars in the history of the City, but for those who would have carried its harsh consequences. He cried also for the people of then and of today: like those of Syria, of Iraq, of Libya, of Afghanistan, of Yemen and

of all the unnamed guerrilla-wars scattered on every continent. Our societies are in need of peace and of reconciliation in terms of human inclusiveness, socio-economic understanding, respect for human rights so frequently violated.

We will not be the great architects of this peace, on an inter-relational level, maybe resorting to a well-known evangelical image, we could call ourselves small workers; but peace, in international relations, in economic disputes, in political and ideological diatribes must, however, be sown, because Christianity is presence: "gift and duty", said Benedict XVI. If on the one hand the gift consists in being gratified by the inner closeness of God, on the other our witness consists in creating the conditions for peace; refugees ask for this, humanitarian workers beg for it, the many victims implore it, and, above all, children plea for it, asking themselves: "Why was I born? Is this the world that belongs to me?" This is the very question I was asked during the tragic days of Isis, in Iraq!

Cardinal Fernando Filoni

(April 19, 2020 - Sunday in albis)