

## 11th Chapter of the Abbot General OCist for MFC – 06.09.2013

This past Sunday almost all of us went to St. Peter's Square for the Angelus of Pope Francis. There we heard his heartfelt appeal to pray and work for peace which is seriously threatened by the crisis in Syria. Tomorrow, the Holy Father has called us to live a day of fasting and prayer for peace. And, as we are here in Rome, we will participate in the prayer vigil announced by the Pope in St. Peter's Square.

I then thought of dedicating the Chapters of today and tomorrow to this dramatic moment which we are living and to the theme of peace. It doesn't make sense to do a Monastic Formation Course separating it from the drama of humanity and the urgent duty of the whole Church to be peacemakers in the world.

However, we are not leaving the theme that we have been deepening, even if perhaps I will anticipate some of the points that I would have treated later because it is obvious that the humble monk, if he is going to radiate anything that is essential of the work of God, then this will be peace. For peace is a form of relationship among human beings that only God can make possible; for us sinners it can only spring from God, from a redemption worked by God, because peace is an "innocent" relationship in the literal sense of the Latin word "*innocens*," which means that it does not harm, that it does not do evil to another. In the Easter sequence, *Victimae paschali*, there is a very powerful sentence: "*Christus innocens Patri reconciliavit peccatores* – The innocent Christ has reconciled sinners to the Father."

It is the innocence of Christ; it is Christ who does not harm, the Lord of peace who reconciles us to the Father, who redeems us, and so makes us innocent as he is, redeemed from evil, and therefore capable of peaceful relations. "Peace be with you," the Risen One says when he appeared to the disciples (Jn 20:19,21,26).

Yesterday I quoted you a beautiful sentence from the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* concerning baptism: "Christ's work penetrates the depths of our being and transforms us radically, making us adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature. It thus modifies all our relationships, our place in this world and in the universe, and opens them to God's own life of communion." (No. 42)

For us, for all Christians, the commitment to peace does not simply mean a militancy for an important social value: it is a commitment that involves us in expressing what we are in our new nature that Christ, dying and rising, realizes in us, and enables us sacramentally to be transformed totally, ontologically, by the paschal mystery. Jesus in baptism, and in all the sacraments, "penetrates the depths of our being" and transforms us "radically" into the children of God. God transforms our relationship with Him, making it filial, identifying it with the relationship of Christ with the Father in the Spirit, and this makes us subjects of new, transformed relationships with every human being.

This transforming work of Christ "modifies all our relationships," which means that all people become our brothers and sisters.

From baptism, from the Christian sacramental identity of our being, however, must be born this new life, this life that corresponds to this our new nature, to this our nature of grace. Our freedom is called upon to say yes to what we are through Christ and in Christ, to that which we are in the filial relationship with the Father that Christ gives us, to what we are in the gift of the Spirit who dwells in us, who groans in us, who prays and loves in us along the path of life and through all of our and others' fragility.

For us, therefore, to speak of peace means to regain awareness of our fraternal responsibility to every person on earth. Christ has made us brothers and sisters of all, he has made humanity a single family. But it is as if this fraternity always needs to begin again and again with us who, in Christ, are unworthily the first-fruits of this human fraternity. A fraternal relationship emerges if one begins to live and to offer fraternity. This opens up space to another, so that the fraternal relationship becomes reciprocal. But the one who took the initiative for fraternity towards all humanity is God. It is the Father who offers us a filial relationship with Him in Christ who has become our brother. This is the great message of John's Chapter 15: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. (...) This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn 15:9-12)

We are called to respond to a love that from the Father reaches us in the Son, but this response, this being in the infinite love of God, Jesus asks us to live in our relations among ourselves, loving one another as He loves us. It is in this fraternal relationship that we say yes to God's love for us, and that we consent to become the Father's children. Thus, Jesus calls us to ideally involve all humanity in the filial transformation of our lives brought about by baptism.

At a time when hatred and death, when relations near or far, seem to radically contradict the Christ event as I have just described; it seems impossible that God could transform the world into a single family. The Church's call reawakens in us the responsibility we have towards what we are in Christ and for the world: brothers and sisters called to summon every human being to the grace of filial life that the Father freely gives us. For us, this means, first of all, consent to the conversion that the Father asks of us: the conversion to fraternity in Christ that the Father's love always makes possible, by first loving and forgiving us all: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours, but we have to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again, he was lost and has been found again." (Luke 15:31-32)

On Sunday, the Pope, began the Angelus with these words: "Today, dear brothers and sisters, I wish to add my voice to the cry which rises up with increasing anguish from every part of the world, from every people, from the heart of each person, from the one

great family which is humanity: it is the cry for peace! It is a cry which declares with force: we want a peaceful world, we want to be men and women of peace, we want in our society, torn apart by divisions and conflict, that peace break out! War never again! Never again war! Peace is a precious gift, which must be promoted and protected."

This "one great family which is humanity" can find peace again by re-finding peaceful relationships. The Pope added: "With all my strength, I ask each party in this conflict to listen to the voice of their own conscience, not to close themselves in solely on their own interests, but rather to look at each other as brothers and decisively and courageously to follow the path of encounter and negotiation, and so overcome blind conflict."

Peace is born continually from renewed relationships, from the renewal of encounters, from relationships among people; just as the father in the parable of the prodigal son does everything possible to restore the fraternal encounter and relationship between his two sons, above and beyond the divisive instincts of jealousy, selfishness, lust for power and prevalence.

The Pope also said at the Angelus: "What can we do to make peace in the world? As Pope John said, it pertains to each individual to establish new relationships in human society under the mastery and guidance of justice and love. [...] I repeat forcefully: it is neither a culture of confrontation nor a culture of conflict which builds harmony within and between peoples, but rather a culture of encounter and a culture of dialogue; this is the only way to peace. (...) Let us ask Mary to help us to respond to violence, to conflict and to war, with the power of dialogue, reconciliation and love. She is our mother: may she help us to find peace; all of us are her children! Help us, Mary, to overcome this most difficult moment and to dedicate ourselves each day to building in every situation an authentic culture of encounter and peace."

This is really the crux of our commitment to peace, to dedicate our lives to live and build human relationships motivated by fraternal communion that Christ gives and asks of us. It is a commitment that starts from prayer, because we are not humanly capable of it. We are not innocent of conflicts in the world! The Church as a mystery of communion in Christ among humans is continually born in prayer in the Upper Room of Pentecost, with Mary, and with the Apostles. Only if one starts from being "one heart in prayer" (Acts 1:14), does one receive from the Holy Spirit the grace to be "of one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32). And it is this peace, this culture of peace that each of us can and must build with their life.

Tomorrow we will ask the Rule of St. Benedict more directly to help us understand this task that the Pope is urgently calling us to do for the whole of humanity.

*Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori OCist*