

Ecumenical Conference “Parables of Communion” – 21.10.2016

29th Week in Ordinary Time (Friday)

(Ephesians 4:1-6 / Luke 12:54-59)

Hope

In 1857, the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh was decapitated for his faith in Christ. During his time in prison, he wrote many letters, in the last one, he declared: “In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart” (quoted in Benedict XVI, *Spes...*, n. 37)

Here today, is there a lively hope in our hearts? Are we a hope-full people?

This is not an optional question. According to St Paul, our Christian calling is at stake. In the letter to the Ephesians, in the one Body which we are called to form, we share “one and the same hope”. For the Apostle, hope is one of the hallmarks of our Christian identity. For him, Gentiles are characterised by the fact that they have no hope and are without God (Eph 2:12).

What is our hope?

With one voice, I suppose that we would all say that “Christ Jesus is our hope” (1Tm 1:1). However, we have to check regularly that our Christ has not become very small, that we have not become men and women of little hope.

It is important to keep in mind that we become what we hope for. When our hope shrinks, we ourselves are diminished. Small and petty hopes make small and petty Christians.

Moreover if Christ is small then our vision of the Church is narrow. In this context, we may wonder whether or not our Church is still, as a document of Faith and Order calls it, “a communion of hope” (*Documentary...*, p. 164).

Maybe the greatest challenge for us is to let go of our way of thinking and to learn to think with the mind of God. The Reformed South African theologian John de Gruchy believes that to become “more human has to do with the deepening of the capacity to imagine and to risk vulnerability” (*Confessions...*, p. 50-51).

We have to humbly acknowledge that too often, in our Christian communities, our hope appears to be reined in, cautiously channelled, and made stingy by our fear to imagine and to take risks.

And yet we are supposed to give a fruitful account of our hope (cf. 1P 3:15).

Yes we have to remember that we are accountable. The communion of hope that we are supposed to form is not an end in itself. It is for the whole world. The Irish Dominican Joe Kavanagh reminds us that “when life looms threateningly, as it frequently does, hope has to be the standard of the church; hope, based on Christ's promise to be there – and ‘there’, not as in time’s end, but in the now” (J. Kavanagh, in *Mining Truths*, p. 420). For the glory of God and the salvation of the world, hope must be the standard of the Church.

Our Conference has gathered together women and men from many different religious and monastic orders. This diversity bears witness to the fact that imagination and hope have been kept alive in the Christian people. The founders of our orders took risks and challenged their churches and the world. They remind us that, as followers of Christ, we cannot acquiesce in things as they are. Their “hope was a resistance movement against fatalism” (*Documentary...*, p. 166) and defeatism. They took the risk to hope because they wanted to be

faithful to Christ. They allowed the creative power of hope to bear fruit for the good of the Body of Christ and for all their brothers and sisters in humanity.

Listening to the prophet, we have to remember “the rock from which we were hewn” (Is 51:1)

Like our founders, the hope that something else is possible should makes us capable of treading on new paths today, of being ready for fresh starts, of being free to move along the path ahead.

Here allow me, as a Benedictine monk, to be truly ecumenical and to quote... a Jesuit theologian! Karl Rahner wrote: “Christian hope (...) makes us free and open for future possibilities of history and society; it makes us free for an unprejudiced approach to a still open, uncontrollable and even dangerous future” (*Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, p. 71-72).

Another challenge to hope is when we get stuck in the present, when imagination is stifled, when all perspective is lost, when we cling fearfully to what we think we know in such a way that it prevents us from opening ourselves to the newness promised by the Lord.

We have to remember that we are a pilgrim people, always on the way and “our life in hope is never to have reached our goal, but always to be on a risk-laden journey” (*Documentary...*, p. 166).

Last June, on the feast of Pentecost, addressing the members of the Council, Patriarch Bartholomew invited the Orthodox Church “to give the contemporary world a testimony of love and unity and to reveal the hidden hope that lies within it” (19.06.2016). These words apply to us today. We are called to give to our divided world a testimony of love and unity and to reveal with boldness and patience the hope that is within us.

There is no glory or salvation for us in keeping our hope hidden and buried. Like the sower in the parable (cf. Mt 13), we are supposed to sow seeds of hope everywhere, generously and indiscriminately.

From the beginning, Christian hope kindled a fire on the earth, a fire which was kept alive in the hearts of so many of our ancestors in the faith. In our turn today may we be beacons of hope, hope for the visible unity among all Christians, hope for a better world where “justice and peace have embraced” (Ps 85:11).