

True Life in God Pilgrimage in Moscow - 1-10 September 2017

How to bridge our divisions and bring peace to the world

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Good afternoon. Peace and blessings for each one of you.

I thank God for the opportunity of being with you in these special days and also for the privilege to share a few words with you.

The organization of this event asked me a brief speech on “How to bridge our divisions and bring peace to the world”. The truth is that from the beginning I found it a huge challenge to talk about this issue that has such deep implications.

For some reason, the image of a road through which we all are walking came to my mind. The way implies movement, that means that we don't want to stay where we are, we want to improve in life, to reach new personal and collective goals. If we are people of faith we want to mature spiritually. And we all (with independence of our beliefs...) want to build a better world, in which we can live in a more dignified and humane way.

I find it really surprising that throughout human history we have so often shown our inability to walk together. And above all, I find hard to accept that this is also true among those who call ourselves “Christians”, children of the same Father and therefore brothers and sisters.

There is a passage in the Gospels that can help us to understand some of the keys that make our unity so difficult to reach.

It is found in the Gospel of St. Mark, chapter 9 and verses 30 to 37. For reasons of time, I would like to read only verses 33 to 35:

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."¹

The stories of the Gospels have the enormous ability to show us very deep thoughts using very simple and everyday images. Specifically, in this brief passage we can find a reflection of the whole history of the Christian Church in this world.

Let's look at the text a little more closely. The disciples follow Jesus on the way, just as we do... But they had been discussing along the way. Perhaps they should have paid more attention to the teachings of Jesus but they engaged in discussion among them; And by doing so, they put Jesus apart. Notice that the Lord did not participate in these discussions that his disciples had and so when they came to the house Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

And the story tells us that the disciples did not answer the Lord, perhaps because they felt ashamed... Perhaps God will ask us the exact same question "What were you arguing about on the way?" Can you imagine how sad it would be if we too should be ashamed before the Lord in an uncomfortable silence?

Now, I believe that it can help us as brothers and sisters who seek for the unity to pay attention to the subject on which the disciples argued: "Who would be the most important, who would be the greatest"

I believe that this sad question has been persecuting the people of God throughout its history and in it we find some implications that had been hurting our unity and fraternity.

And is that when we ask as individuals or as communities "Who is the most important?" We are establishing categories among us; We make the way with a competitive mind, looking at the other as my rival and not as my brother.

¹New International Version

When in our heart we ask that kind of question, we are admitting that some are better than others; that some of us are bigger than the others; that the truth we possess about God is more authentic than that of my brother who does not think or believe exactly as I do... When we fall into this dangerous dynamic, we are trying to possess God, conform it according to our mental or ecclesiological structures ... And the truth is that none of us can take possession of God, no one can think that he possesses the monopoly of His truth, the monopoly of His Person or His love...

Now, when we think that some of us are better than others, when we think that we can possess God and lock him into our own mental structures, we end up believing that ours is the only truth that counts and that we have the right to impose it on others. Then it is when the truth of God, that is to be a source of life and dignity, becomes an element in the service of the religious institution (whatever the name may have ...), it becomes the perfect excuse to fill our hunger for power.

I believe that all Christian churches have sometimes fallen into this sin, and we must ask the Lord for forgiveness. And we must ask God together that He will teach us more about the nature of His Kingdom, that which Jesus approached in this world, in which there is no place for competition and rivalry, one in which there are no categories or barriers between its citizens, that in which no one pretends to take possession of God, but is God who takes over us, the kingdom that rests on His mercy, justice and love.

The Kingdom of God is one in which each one of us lives for the others, because when we love the brother we are loving God himself. A God who is very close to us, He is walking beside us, we don't have to leave Him apart with our discussions. Let Him continue to lead us and make us instruments of His love, peace and hope for this world through which we walk together. May the Lord bless you.