

SPEECH BY Bishop Riah

2017 PILGRIMAGE

Jesus said : " Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God".
And St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians challenges the believers to be the reconcilers: " All this from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself , and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ."

A) Introduction:

Let me first greet you with salaam, and convey the same from our people in the Land many refer to as the Holy Land , of which I speak of as the Land of the Holy One. This is so due to the fact that holy may mean a land with many holes, which I am afraid is true now, as a result of the on-going conflict in the Middle East.

B) Meeting Prime Minister Tony Blair.

This brings me straight to share with you a meeting with the then P.M. of the United Kingdom , Mr. Tony Blair, on February 18, 2003, days before the war on Iraq . I was one of four bishops , two from England, one from the United States, and myself , trying to divert his attention from war to peaceful means. His response was : " We go to war against Iraq in order to pave the way for peace in the Middle East.!!!!??? To which I responded: 'Mr. P.M. : The shortest route to Baghdad goes through Jerusalem. Once peace comes to Jerusalem , peace will come to the whole world".

We all know what happened, the peace he brought to the M.E. and how not only Iraq but a whole Middle East was torn into pieces .

C) Peace is the way .

My friends; wars never bring genuine peace. Genuine peace is not the absence of war, neither the cessation of hostilities, and certainly not the quiet which comes out of subjugation and oppression. Peace is the way.

There is no place under the sun where the term peace / Salaam/ Shalom is used as we do in Israel, Palestine , the Arab countries , the so called Holy Land. We greet one another with Salaam or Shalom , or Asalamu Alaikum. Church leaders and Rabbis and Imams preach long sermons on it. Children are named Salaam and Shalom. So also high rises in Tel-Aviv , and different centers and towns. And yet, not much of Salaam or Shalom. The term has been so used, so misused, and so abused that it became not only devalued , but causes some to doubt one's sincerity when using it. I am reminded of Psalm 120 where God is quoted saying : " I am for peace , but when I speak , they are for war".

D) Peace where there is conflict.

The search for peace and reconciliation does not mean the avoidance of conflict.

We may contribute to peace , and/or engage in acts of reconciliation only where there is conflict. There is no lack of conflicts around us: not only among nations, but also among individuals, within families and among neighbors. No one with enough common sense leaves conflicting parties to busy himself in reconciling parties in love. Those in love do not need you or me. And note peace-making cannot be done with remote controls. One need be there. Mind you it is never a picnic.

E) What is our mission ? Whose task is it?

What is really this ministry we have been given as believers in God? It is the work of breaking down walls of mistrust and hostility wherever they exist, and particularly as they are constructed around differences of culture, race, nationality , religion and economic status. To reconcile is to bring into right relationship , to re-order our relationships and restore unity with God and one with another. This is not the task of politicians . This is your task and mine. We are called to help reconcile. We are called to struggle against evil . How ?

The great Mahatma of India , Ghandi, used to say : " To refuse to struggle against the evil, and the injustices of our world is to surrender our humanity ; to struggle against the evil with the weapons of the evil doer is to enter into your humanity; to struggle against the evil , the injustices and the oppression with the weapons of God is to enter your divinity".

F) Brother's brother and Sister's sister.

Allow me to end with a story that must have happened somewhere in Moscow, which in my opinion helped two people to enter into their divinity:

Tolstoy, the famous Russian author of books, was approached by a man in need on one of the streets of Moscow. Tolstoy , like many writers of books in those days failed to find any money in his pocket. He turned to the beggar and said: " Brother , had I had any money with me , I would have given it to you. Sorry I have none ". To which the beggar responded : " You have given me more than I expected . You called me brother ".

Are we in a position to relate one to another as brothers and sisters . Are we ready to recognize the otherness of the other the way we wish them do so. Or do we continue to follow in the footsteps of Cain : ' Am I my brother's keeper ?'

Dear sisters and brothers: we are called to be : not only brothers' keepers, but more brother's brother and sister's sister.

--

+ **Bishop Riah Abo El Assal**

Mobile 972 54 3100089

Tel & Fax 972 4 6000201