



## From A Bishop's Journal (740)

### Family- and Parish-Based Catechesis on Peace (6) “Deserters Because of Me”

**H**oly Week, the Holy Days, the Easter Triduum... which we are all invited to experience every year, will they weaken our faith, as Jesus prophesied to his disciples at the Last Supper (“You will all become deserters because of me.”)? Are these days to be experienced in total indifference or nostalgia, or as times of prayer, contemplation, action, and commitment to peace?

#### **An Ancient Dream**

At the beginning of the Book of Isaiah there is a beautiful prophecy which we always hope will be fulfilled as quickly as possible: “In days to come, the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: ‘Come, let us climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.’ For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” Would we dare make such a wish today? Pray such a prayer? Work at such a project of peace? How can we help bring about such an “ancient” yet youthful and timely dream, amid the chaos of today?

#### **A Peaceful Life?**

The Gospels were first of all catecheses to the first Christian communities and, as such, they did not report the anguish and sufferings of Jesus, the first thirty years of his life, except for the long journey to Bethlehem in the most complete poverty, the sorrow prophesied to his mother and to those who would believe in him, the flight to Egypt, and the murder of the holy Innocents. We have to wait until his baptism in the Jordan and his stay in the desert, for the evangelists to record the adversities Jesus encountered throughout his ministry. Even the proclamation at Nazareth of the mission he had been given by his Father triggered a frightening episode when the people tried to throw him over the cliff. Each evangelist narrates in his own way the painful events and the constant troubles that were his lot. The evangelists slowly lead us through the many trials of his passion, not only his passion and death, but to his very extraordinary victory over evil, suffering, and sin, to the glory of the

resurrection. To every disciple of Jesus who wants to be a peacemaker, this is the “royal” road marked out for him or her: it is the path of life, not by way of the sword or any other murderous weapon, but through the supreme gift of one’s life.

### **The Cross, Way of Peace**

“*Vexilla Regis prodeunt.*” “The royal standard approaches, the mystery of the cross shines forth, mystery of our flesh offered up in the flesh of the Creator himself.” In a summary form that can hardly be imitated, Christians over the centuries have acclaimed Jesus and his entry into Jerusalem, acclaimed by the people: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” A king stripped of every trapping of glory, a humble king who has courageously come to the place that is soon to be his place of passion and death. “*Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.*” This is how thousands upon thousands of disciples have acclaimed him for centuries as the victorious king who reigns with compassion and kindness. This is the king of peace who has only the law of the Beatitudes, for humankind; a law that he himself followed before preaching it, the law of the poor, a law of mercy and justice, forgiveness, purity, and peace. On this “Palm Sunday,” the entire populace welcomes this prophet who performed so many miracles as he passed by, and who never stopped reminding one and all that he was sent by the Lord of lords, by his Father who had presented him as His “beloved Son” in whom He was well pleased.

### **But Still Rejected by His Own**

At the very beginning of his Gospel, Saint John tells the reader about the tragic end of the one who was sent by the Father: “To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him.” The prophet of peace, like many of the other prophets before him, had an atrocious death. People were already plotting against him, the civil and religious authorities devised ways to get rid of him. In a few bold strokes, the Evangelists record the most contemptible humiliations to which this man of peace was exposed. Knowing that his hour had come, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples to commemorate the Great Passage of the chosen people from Egypt to the Promised Land. He greatly desired to celebrate this Passover with his friends. Jesus did not come to abolish the ancient rite which actualised the deliverance of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, but he brought it to completion and gave it a new meaning, one of service and of peace, of love without compare. Jesus surprised his disciples by washing their feet to give them an example of the new commandment. And by giving them the bread he gave his body which was soon to be surrendered to his enemies; in passing them the wine it was his blood that he gave, soon to be shed for the salvation of all. And in a prayer that only a God-Man can say, he glorified the Father and went into a long prayer, to consecrate in unity and holiness all those he loved. His prayer became more and more intent as he prayed for the peace he wanted to give the world, a peace that only he can give to all people of all time.

### **“All Is Accomplished...”**

To these moments of great intimacy with his Father and his disciples, there quickly followed an intense agony as he sweated blood; then he was betrayed by his friend for a ridiculous sum of money, and brutally arrested. His disciples ran away, and Peter himself repudiated him, after having pledged lasting fidelity to his Master. There were the mock trials, both religious and civil, the inhuman

flogging, words and actions to ridicule Jesus before the crowd, the infamous choice of Barabbas over him, the abominable judgement, the sorrowful walk to Calvary, followed by the atrocious crucifixion, and the blasphemous words regarding him. Even the Father seemed to have abandoned him: “Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?” However, Jesus knew that he was the Father’s beloved Son and that is why he could say, after confiding his mother to the care of the apostle John, he generously handed over his soul to the Father: “All is accomplished.” No book can ever tell all that Jesus experienced, all that was accomplished during his youthful existence. With the centurion who witnessed the execution of Jesus, we can only say: “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

### **A Costly Peace**

It was at this price that Jesus bought peace for all humankind. “We adore you, O Lord, and we worship you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.” These words are “carved” by the faith of all the believers in Jesus. If through the centuries we could write: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians,” the blood of Jesus himself is first and foremost, the seed of peace for all the world. He has destroyed the walls of hatred that divided mankind and, in his blood, he sealed the new covenant, the new communion between God and humankind. “*O Crux, ave, spes unica.*” “Hail, O Cross, our only hope.” In this Passiontide, increase the justice of the faithful and forgive all offenses. God shall reign over all the nations through the cross. The sacred hymn, *Vexilla Regis prodeunt*, despite its age and difficult language, can still tell us about the great mystery of our faith: “We proclaim your death, Lord Jesus.”

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03-12-08