

22. October 2024

## Jesus and true peace

Eph 2:12-22

*Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

When one is in Jerusalem reading this passage from the Letter to the Ephesians, as I am at the moment, the words of St Paul can be particularly eloquent. The ringing of the bells, the frequent calls to prayer by the muezzin, the blast of the shofar announcing the beginning of 'Shabbat' remind us that people of different religions live in the Holy City. Quite different from these calls to prayer is the menacing sound of warplanes. When you hear them, you know that they are heading for Gaza, Lebanon, perhaps even Iran, to try to solve by force the problems that have not yet found a peaceful solution in the Middle East. It may even happen that you will witness missile and drone attacks with your own eyes, and that you will see an eerie glow in the night sky, indicating that an attack is taking place and that a missile defence system is being deployed.

Certainly, such a biblical meditation is not the right framework to reflect in detail on this complex situation with its political, historical, religious and psychological implications. Nevertheless, these words of St. Paul get one essential point right.

The Apostle is addressing the Ephesians who, before their encounter with Christ, had lived in the world as pagans, aliens from the covenants of promise and separated from God. As a result, there was enmity between Jews and Gentiles, but this was overcome by the death of the Son of God on the cross. This is a very significant statement: in Christ the wall of separation, the enmity, was broken down and through Him both Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father in one Spirit.

Is this not the spiritual solution to the problem we find today in the land of Jesus and the apostles? A solution which, if applied in a concrete way, can touch all the areas necessary to bring about a deep reconciliation and thus a visible peace.

We cannot assume that all Jews in Israel live their faith actively. Many are Jews only on a cultural level, others do not believe at all, while others try to live their faith concretely. But what they all have in common is that they have not yet met the Saviour, so that they do not yet live in that grace which God offers to all people through His Son, giving them free access to Him.

Certainly, practicing Jews who strive to keep the commandments feed much more on what God entrusted to His people in the Old Covenant. But, as St Paul says in another of his letters, 'a veil blinds their minds' (2 Cor 3:15), preventing them from recognising in Jesus the face of God. From today's reading we can conclude that the enmity between Jews and Gentiles has not yet been overcome, nor has the peace in God that unites us been able to come. Traditional Jewish faith lacks the grace that comes from recognising Jesus as the Messiah and therefore does not have the power in itself to bring about true reconciliation.

Let us now look at the Palestinians, the majority of whom are Muslims. Perhaps the percentage of those who practise their faith is higher than among the Jews. But they too lack a true knowledge of Christ. Although they regard Jesus as a prophet, they do not recognise Him as the Son of God who became man to save all humanity. Therefore, they do not understand His redemptive death on the cross and the grace that comes to all people through Him. In this sense, Muslims also lack the grace of Christ. Their own religion is unable to give them the strength for true reconciliation and unity with others in God.

From all that has been said so far it is clear how important it is that both Jews and Muslims - as well as those who do not believe in God - receive an authentic witness to the Christian faith. As they embrace the Lord and begin to live according to His teachings, God's grace can work in their hearts and there will be that peace which only He can give.

This is what the Middle East and the whole world need to find true peace through obedience to God's commandments and the Saviour's grace.

Those Jews and Palestinians who have already had the joy of knowing and following the Lord may be especially entrusted today with the task of witnessing to the incomparable love of Jesus in their land.