

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
(Jeremiah 38:4-6.8-10 / Luke 12:49-53)  
14.08.2022  
*Truth & Lie*

With St Paul, we believe that Christ is our peace (cf. Eph 2:14). So how is it then that Christ is able to say: “Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No.”

With this blunt and challenging statement the Lord wants to lead us to reflect on what we mean when we speak of peace.

In this context the first reading shows us how false peace is no peace at all. The king Zedekiah was a coward and spineless leader, he was unable to make a decision and longed for a cosy and comfortable peace which would not rock the boat. For their part, the king’s leading men might have been more courageous but they were misguided, ill-informed and unwilling to heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah.

The mistake made by the King and the leaders of the people was to believe that peace was possible without truth, without the words of truth which were addressed to them by the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Over and over again Jeremiah reminds us that there is no lasting peace without truth. A truth that brings us back to reality, to facts and not only to feelings and emotions. A truth that imposes itself only by the force of its truth, not by any other violent means.

That is the peace that Jesus brings us. It is a peace purified by the fire of truth, by reality and by facts.

Sometimes, like the leaders of the people of Israel who persecuted the prophet Jeremiah, we prefer the lies which keep everybody quiet to the truth which would unsettle our superficial sense of security and our false harmony. Sometimes, and we have seen this at work often in society and Churches, we are more concerned with appearances and with the power game than with the truth that would challenge our position and the image we want to project to the world.

The great struggle of the prophet Jeremiah is with the prophets of lies. Those men who, according to Jeremiah, “have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace.” (6:14)

Lies cannot bring peace, lies cannot create security, lies cannot beget life.

Only truth begets peace, only truthful words can generate trust and harmony. Prophets of lies are particularly abhorrent to Jeremiah and to the whole biblical tradition because they pervert God’s gift to humankind: the gift to speak meaningful and life-giving words.

At the beginning of his Rule, quoting a psalm, St Benedict clearly sets the tone when he reminds us that will enter into the kingdom the one who “speaks the truth from his heart and has not practised deceit with his tongue (...) nor listened to slanders against his neighbour.” (Ps 14:2-3 in RB Prol. 26-27)

In society and in our Churches, each time we lie and do not speak the truth, we cannot expect life to flourish and situations to progress in the right direction. Lies result in confusion and chaos and so threaten the bonds that unite us. It is only when we seek truth and when we speak it in love that we build up the community in peace.

It is important to note that false peace can have two opposite consequences: either it creates chaos and violence or it imprisons us in a cosy ghetto, as Pope Francis said, it

“anaesthetises us.” (*Meditation*, 16.05.2017) In both cases we are cut off from others, by hate or by indifference.

The challenge made explicit by Jesus’ words in our Gospel reading is that God’s truthful words separate but they do so in order to generate life and create harmony as happened in the story of creation (cf. Gn 1).

The commitment to truth is a commitment to peace and the ministry of speaking the truth which has been confided to all of us is a costly ministry.

In a time when, particularly on social media, there are so many prophets of lies, so many false truths, so much fake news, it is absolutely necessary for us to be humble and courageous. Humble out of respect for truth, for facts, for reality and for others. But because we care for peace we must be courageous. The philosopher Lee McIntyre encourages us. He writes: “We must always fight back against lies. We should never assume that any claim is ‘too outrageous to be believed.’ (...) We must challenge falsehoods before they are allowed to fester.” (p. 155-156)

In Hiroshima, Pope Francis shared his conviction that “peace is no more than an empty word unless it is founded on truth.” (*Address*, 24.11.2019)

At the level of our political and religious leaders, in our families and communities, we have to be on the watch for truth and honesty in the way we speak and in our behaviour if we really want to be peacemakers and children of God (cf. Mt 5:9).

Before Brexit, in the United Kingdom we were given a flow of false information and economic data and, from Russia, before the invasion of Ukraine happened, we heard many speeches containing distorted historic facts. The consequences of this are that people are dying in Ukraine and that we are in a complete mess in Northern Ireland.

Our responsibility is to remain seekers of truth and lovers of peace. It is because we are pilgrims of truth that we are pilgrims of peace.