

Welcoming address by the Prior, Enzo Bianchi

XXII International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

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in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY THE PRIOR OF BOSE, ENZO BIANCHI

To all of you, sincere greetings from me and from the community, and on all of you the invocation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are again together for the XXII International Ecumenical Conference, which this year we dedicate to a theme taken from the Lord's beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called children of God" (Mt 5,9).

I believe that more than ever before we are aware that, while it is true that peace is the Lord's gift, a gift from on high, a Messianic promise, it also remains true that the contrary of peace — enmity, violence, war — remains a great seduction for men. At times we ask ourselves whether there is not a great folly inherent in mankind, because with the experience of wars and of violence mankind always tries to take steps in the opposite direction and remembers the events of war with sorrow and even repentance, but immediately is again seduced by war and continues to wage war.

Discerning eyes are needed to see this situation, and according to me, the words of pope Francis, the bishop of Rome, which just now see a third world war waged in fragments, are true, because, as we commemorate the first European world war and have recently commemorated the second European world war, in which the authorities of the various nations met in sign of reconciliation and peace, we see all the better that the temptation of war is victorious. Our Mediterranean is in flames, and we know the situation of the Middle East: our brothers and sisters are persecuted and give us a witness that should shame us, who do not experience persecution, do not know adversaries of our faith, yet are not at all capable of proposing initiatives of peace.

We should indeed feel that before the Lord we are not consistent with his mandate, with his commandment of reciprocal love and of the gift of peace to exchange with each other and to implant in the world. The Church ought to be a community of peace and a school of peace for all people. Certainly, today she raises her voice, but we should be in greater agreement and raise it in such a way that the Lord may hear us, according to his promise: Where two or three agree on asking something of my Father, my Father will grant it (Mt 18,19).

This theme, then, calls all of us to a conversion to peace, and these days it is a great gift from God that we who are from different Churches desire reconciliation, want to arrive at visible communion, that we meditate on peace. We meditate on it not only for ourselves. Of course, it appeals to our conscience, but we meditate on it also for humanity, for the world, in its name, because peace is the great Messianic promise for all men, not only for Israel, not only for the community of Christians. This is why the first thought is of thanksgiving to God, who again this year has permitted this meeting. The Lord sustains us with his power, he continues to renew in us the conviction of how good is this our meeting, this our face-to-face, this our seeking together his will, hence truly a great thanksgiving to the Lord, who is present in our midst.

We count for little, often our Churches are communities of saints and of sinners, often we are shambles or ships in a stormy sea, tossed about by the winds. That is so! This was the case with the boat of the Lord Jesus, and it cannot be different for us. Yet we, like the disciples, are called to be people of more than little faith, not to doubt, to place our hope in the Lord. He alone is our strength, he alone is our peace. He who has demolished the great wall of separation, the wall between Israel and the nations, and has demolished it definitively, can all the more easily demolish the walls between our Churches, but also the walls between men.

Sincerely and from the heart we thank the Lord because he gives us this grace to be together and to practice mutual love, to listen to each other, to hear what is in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, to be as much as possible, as much as the Holy Spirit grants us, peacemakers in such a way as one day to merit the beatitude: "Blessed are the peaceful, because they will be called children of God" (Mt 5,9).