



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - April 2015

PEACE AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE (EG 238-258) – Spiritual preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

We might agree that peace is the deepest human desire. We all want peace, we all want to live in peace. But we might ask ourselves: what is peace? What is that peace which we desire?

Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio* noted that "peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men"¹.

Here we have a first element for understanding what peace is: justice. Therefore, we can affirm that there is no true peace without justice. Continuing with this affirmation, we could say that there is no justice without equality between people and a world which permits the integral development of all people.

¹ Cf. Enc. POPULORUM PROGRESSIO, n° 76.

Let us take a brief detour to look at the life of our holy founder and discover that he was very committed in promoting the social unity of the people of his time. One of the first apostolates of Saint Vincent Pallotti in the field of education was when, in the year 1819, while still very young, he began to work in a night school and then founded another school for artisans, because he understood that these schools provided an opportunity to give illiterate Roman young people a real possibility to prepare themselves better for an uncertain future.

The second element for understanding the nature of peace is: dialogue. In such a way that it is also possible to say that there is no true peace without dialogue. And dialogue will be necessary until each one of us is able to look at and recognise others as equals with the same dignity. In olden times, Socrates believed that dialogue was the path to encountering truth.

Dialogue allows us to see that differences enrich rather than impoverish or lead to division. The fact that we are different from each other makes dialogue an opportunity to enrich ourselves, and to accept that others are different.

Without this second element being clearly present, we cannot fulfil what is proper to the apostolic charism left to us by Pallotti. In the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,

the Holy Father Francis reminds us that evangelisation implies a path of dialogue².

When someone finds themselves faced with a problem, they are not so much interested in resolving it as in communicating it, needing to share it, and this gives relief. And so the need for a capacity for empathy. That is, to put oneself in the other's place in order to discover the reason for their attitudes, their needs. Not recognising differences, the opportunity is often lost to comprehend, to understand, to accompany, and above all, to interpret the feelings of another. This can be easily transferred to the field of religion. The Christian or any other person, whether or not they profess a faith, should not mock the beliefs of others simply because they are different from their own.

It often happens that certain intellectuals and educated people tend to be in favour of complementarity and dialogue, but some claim to demonstrate a cognitive monopoly which leaves no room for others. This is a key point in the dialogue between science and faith. It is necessary to avoid the various "imperialisms" which seek to attribute a monopoly of truth to a particular approach, however important or noble it may be, forgetting that objective truth can be arrived at by different paths and that the sincere search for truth requires mutual respect between those who seek it.

² Cf. EVANGELII GAUDIUM, n° 238

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, who taught us to love each other deeply, so that we might be happy in our lives. We must understand that every situation in life is an occasion to love one another, to give ourselves to each other, to seek the truth together, also in the way in which we desire to build our fraternal relationships, sustained by a love which manifests itself in our dialogue. Help us to be mature in dealing with differences of opinion, because we want to grow while being held by your hand. Amen.

Reflection:

1. In what places and situations in the society in which I live do I discover that peace is not present because justice is lacking?
2. How is our dialogue with our brothers and sisters who profess a faith different to ours? Do we lock ourselves into our approaches, or do we seek ways to open dialogue?
3. Remember a moment in which our dialogue brought us from a position of distance to a new and positive experience.
4. What things do not promote dialogue on religious matters?
5. Propose a goal to improve dialogue in the family.

*Fr. Fernando Bello SAC,
National Formation Promoter,
Argentina*