

Homily of Bishop Czeslaw Kozon
at the Mass for Europe at the Church of Notre-Dame du Sablon, Brussels
Wednesday October 23rd 2019

Readings: 2. Cor. 5,14-20

Luke 12,39-48

“The old creation has gone, and now the new one is here” (2. Cor.5,17b). These words from the reading of the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians are clearly aimed at those redeemed by Christ. Here we are told, that through Christ things have changed for us human beings, so that there is a before and after Christ not only regarding the eras of time and history but first of all through his work of salvation. This before and after Christ also divides our individual lives making a difference between the time we have known and followed Christ and the time before. Both as a Christian family of human beings and as individuals we must always be conscious of this before and after, appreciate the difference and live and give testimony according to it, be convinced that Christ and the impact he has made is of importance and worthwhile proclaiming and defending.

Also profane and social history is full of “befores and afters.” Some changes have occurred in a dramatic way through wars or revolutions, others have developed slowly but inevitably. Some have been longed for and welcomed, others have been desired but not always completely fulfilled, others again have started rolling causing concern, but impossible or difficult to halt, some have been just and reasonable, others have caused setbacks.

All these ways of change have been and are a part of the history of our Continent. Views on them are different and can sometimes be divisive. There are many legitimate differences between people, countries and cultures, and life would be boring and uninspiring without them. As Christians we even dare to say, that these legitimate differences reflect the being of God and so are part of his vision for creation, both to calm those afraid of uniformity, and to inspire those reluctant to diversity, so that all people can be gathered as his big family.

Purely human views of all these processes and developments are foreign to Christ and our views on these views should not be purely human either, although we cannot and shall not deny our different backgrounds or completely ignore our fears. Also as Christians we can be tempted exclusively to place confidence in what we know and what makes us comfortable and to submit to fear. This is human, but also something that we should allow to be changed, so that we may become part of the new creation that Christ has brought about for us.

The new creation of Christ, however, has to be permanently made present. The progress of time makes it obvious and the setbacks in those already recreated makes it necessary. As Christians we see it as part of our missionary task and as an admission of the necessity of permanent conversion. So we show ourselves obedient and committed to Christ's plan for the salvation of the World, overwhelmed, pressed or constrained by his love (2. Cor. 5,14)

Sometimes Christians only see a task in caring for their own salvation, and many around them would be happy if that was the case. One's own salvation is an important and serious matter, but as Christians we are sent to the World, not to conquer it, but to show God's love and concern for it and especially for the human family. This attitude is expressed in the introduction to the pastoral constitution of the second Vatican Council on the Church in the modern World, "Gaudium et Spes." *"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."*

These words of Vatican II are directed both to the Church and to the World: To the Church to declare its openness to the World in dialogue and concern, an openness that, to be fair, had already been shown for a century in the social teaching of the Church, but now had to be shown on a background of societies and people much more developed, pluralistic, fragmented, individualistic, hostile and indifferent, but also wounded and vulnerable, disappointed and left behind, disorientated and without guidance.

But these words were also guided to the World to show that Christianity is not self-centered and unwilling towards dialogue. However, to make this attitude of Christianity possible, the World, - more concretely, the various nations and societies - must also give the necessary space for Christians to live and practice their faith, at least as an effect of the human right of freedom of religion, but much more by seeing Christianity as a fruitful contribution to society, - if not immediately by accepting the teaching, then at least as a recognition of a tradition that shaped a continent and by being reminded that some fundamental truths about mankind cannot be defined just by a majority or public opinion.

It must be a fundamental attitude of Christians to be people of hope, in daily life to be instinctively optimistic. However, many things can and obviously do frustrate this hope and optimism. Religion to many people seem increasingly irrelevant, international treaties and collaboration are questioned, individual countries are

challenged by polarization and radical changes in the political landscape, the mobility of people, whether caused by violent tragedies or encouraged by fruitful cross-border collaboration and cultural exchange create a lot of new needs and adjustments.

There are no quick and easy solutions to all this. However, what can always be shown is awareness and concern. At the end of today's gospel Jesus speaks about servants, some of whom have been entrusted much, others entrusted less. The demands on them are different, according to how much they have been given.

As Christians we have been given quite a great deal and consequently much is demanded of us, first of all by the Lord, but also by the expectations and hopes of our surroundings. These demands and expectations should be met by a faith shown with authenticity in actions and testimony, avoiding all scandals and contradictions. But not only Christians or Christians as Christians have been given much. Our entire Continent, the individual nations, groups and individuals in society are quite privileged, and still more so, if you belong to an influencing group or are entrusted with leadership. Even if not all recognize a God above them, there are demands to be met, responsibility to be shown, opportunities to be shared, justice to be enforced. Even if you do not recognize a God to be pleased or feared, accountability is demanded due to a great responsibility, not to destabilize society, nationally or internationally, not to endanger peace and justice and to increase tensions.

In today's reading St. Paul speaks about reconciliation, a word alien to many people because there is not always a sense of fault and guilt. For many development seems linear and pointing forward. However, a just and enduring progress cannot be achieved only by looking forward. Especially when obstacles occur, you have to look backwards and ask: What went wrong, what should have been done otherwise, who has been neglected, what is my part in all this? Only by facing and assessing all this true progress can be achieved. Reconciliation is not only a point of departure, when things have gone irreversibly wrong or something wrong can no longer be upheld. Reconciliation is a permanent process, at least an instrument, that should never be placed out of reach.

St. Paul calls himself an ambassador of Christ and appeals for reconciliation to God. For Christians it is a duty to be such ambassadors and always to seek reconciliation. The duty of ambassadors, also the professional ones, is to create good relations, sort out difficulties. As Christians we see God as the source and goal of these processes, but every person of good will should be able to see that it is worthwhile and strive for it, thus perhaps even unconsciously becoming an ambassador of Christ. Amen.

