

## ECUMENICAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN BRUSSELS

**Tuesday 6 June 2023 8.00 - 9.00**

hosted by MEP Jan Olbrycht

**Prof. Tomáš Halík, President of the Czech Christian Academy,**

will reflect on Isaiah 1:12-18 "Do good; seek justice"

with Rev. Christian Krieger, President of CEC

and H. E. Msgr. Mariano Crociata, President of COMECE

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Sisters and Brothers,

In the Book of Prophet Isaiah, we read:

*"Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile (...); I am weary of bearing them. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow."*

These words are testimony to one of the most crucial turning points in history. The prophet Isaiah announces the end of religion (religion in the sense of human manipulation of the sacred) and the birth of *faith*, faith as *orthopraxis*, as a *process of learning to do good for others and to strive for social justice*.

Orthodoxy without orthopraxis is dead. Relationships with God cannot be separated from relationships with people. Faith, the gift of grace, the life of God in man, is an invisible mystery. "No one has ever seen God," says Scripture, but we can experience his presence in people's acts of love and hope. He is present, visible, and credible in their effort to *learn to do good and seek justice*.

Christian faith, faith in the mystery of the incarnation, is an incarnated faith. True faith lies not in what believers think and say, but in their relationships with others, especially in their solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. The prophet Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible and the St. James' epistle in the New Testament boldly assert that faith as a relationship to God is implicit in "social love," from selfishness to solidarity.

The Spirit of Jesus Christ teaches us "spiritual discernment," a sensitivity to God's presence and His action in the world - even far beyond the visible boundaries of the churches.

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At Pentecost, we celebrated the feast of the birth of the Church.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, the Church was born from the Pentecostal storm.

According to the Gospel of John, the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles on the day of the resurrection.

The apostles were depressed and closed in fear of the Jews. These men, in their masculine pride and narrow-mindedness, were hesitant to believe the testimony of women, especially Mary Magdalene, the "apostle of the apostles."

Jesus overcame the locked door of fear and distrust, came among them, legitimized himself with his wounds, and brought them his first and greatest gift: *his promised Spirit*. "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

He breathed on them as the Creator called the first human being to life with His breath. Jesus thereby healed and resurrected the wounded, crucified faith of the apostles. He gave them a new, more profound, and fuller life.

The gift of the Spirit is the gift of forgiveness and peace, the power that overcomes fear. Forgiveness and reconciliation mean new life, a new beginning, a new chance. Followers of Christ are to spread this healing mission so that all may rise from the grave of fear and guilt to new life.

But the Church needs forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing to accomplish its mission.

According to Jesus' words, the Spirit's mission is to guide into the fullness of truth. Throughout its history, the Church has had in the power of the Spirit to carry out this "hermeneutical task" - to interpret the mysteries entrusted to it ever more profoundly and anew, to penetrate anew into the infinite depth of Jesus' words, teaching, and example.

"You cannot understand it now - you will understand it later," Jesus tells the apostles.

We must constantly grow in our understanding of the Gospel. Our faith still needs to mature. This is as true of the process of faith in individual believers' lives as in the Church's history.

Here on earth, in the world, in history, we see the things of God - St. Paul writes - only partially, as in a mirror, in images and parables - only in the arms of God can the individual person, but also the community of believers, the Church, understand and see God fully, "face to face."

This is an urgent warning against the pride and foolishness of those who would already claim to be "owners of the truth." The fullness of truth is in Jesus alone, and he alone can say, "I am the truth." We are not Jesus; we are only his imperfect, ever-learning disciples. *We are a community of pilgrims, and throughout our journey through history, we need each other; we need each other's experiences and spiritual gifts to complement our own.*

If all truth were already contained and bound up "letter" in the text of the Bible, dogmas, papal encyclicals, church regulations, and theological theories of the past, then we would need no more church, no more theology, no more preaching, no more listening to the Spirit in prayer.

Perhaps such a closed understanding of Christianity and the faith would be the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" that Jesus emphatically warns against as the most dangerous of sins. We must not hinder the blowing of the Spirit, who continues to teach and guide us more and more again and again.

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The Spirit teaches us to "read the signs of the times" and teaches us the art of spiritual discernment. He teaches us to name the good as good and the evil as evil. He teaches us the courage of prophets in the face of tyrants.

*Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow. "*

As we gather for prayer, we must not forget the Calvary of our time, Ukraine. The blood of the innocent victims of Putin's genocide in Ukraine and the suffering of Ukrainian children taken to Russia cry out to the Lord of Hosts.

Not political compromise and the peace of cemeteries, but only justice and *just peace* can bring peace back to a country that today signs its application for admission to the family of free European nations with its blood.

The severe moral duty of the world family of Christians to publicly, loudly, and openly to people like Patriarch Kyrill that supporting the Russian genocide in Ukraine is a betrayal of Christ and apostasy from the Gospel. Representatives of the Church must not become puppets in the hands of gangsters and war criminals, nor must they be guilty of silence, apathy, false neutrality, or diplomatic cleverness, following the example of "the smartness of this world." No one can serve two masters, God and the murdering aggressor.

"Cease from evil, learn to do good," cries the Lord of hosts.

I feel a moral obligation to recall the historical experience of my native country.

When the leaders of Western democracy sacrificed the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, and then the whole country, to Hitler because they thought it would save the peace, they helped him to start a world war. If today the West were to cave into Putin and sacrifice Ukraine, it would make the same tragic mistake and endanger the security and peace of the entire world. The defeat of Ukraine would be an encouragement to all dictators and aggressors on the planet.

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We live in a challenging time. Pope Francis calls our time a "fragmentary third world war."

From the experiences of the First and Second World Wars were born the bold visions of great Christian thinkers such as Teilhard de Chardin, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They all understood that the time had come for Christians to discover beyond traditional theism a "greater God," the ever-greater God (*Deus semper maior*).

Bonhoeffer was convinced that the Christian faith must free itself from old religious concepts, as it had once freed itself from the Mosaic Law. Teilhard offered a new Christology, a grand processual vision of a cosmic, universal Christ.

Will the pains and anxieties of our time become the birth pangs of a new and more profound ecumenical theology and spirituality? Will they bring new impulses and encouragement for the journey of the Church and the entire human family through history?

I see the seed of a new ecclesiology in Pope Francis' call for the synodal renewal of the Church. In the conditions of our time, the Church is to return in a new and creative way to

its original, dynamic, processual form - the form of the Church as a shared journey (synodos).

It is not only the Roman Church that needs synodal renewal.

The excellent task of our time is to discover and realize what lies behind the keyword: a *common* path, a **shared** journey. To go together.

It is necessary to go out to *new horizons of ecumenism*. Respect for diversity and the search for compatibility and mutual enrichment of the various Christian traditions is an essential but *only the first step* on the path outlined in Pope Francis' encyclical Fratelli Tutti.

When new barriers and abysses appear on the world's political map, the flame of the desire for *the unity of the whole human family* must be kept alive in the souls of people behind all cultural frontiers.

The Second Vatican Council and the pontificate of Pope Francis are two essential steps in the transition from "Catholicism to Catholicity" to ever broader and deepen openness to the blowing of God's Spirit towards the eschatological goal, the "Omega Point" when God will be all in all.

Not only all Christian communities but "all people of goodwill" must be invited to this journey.

It is not a one-way path of progress but a constant struggle with the temptations of regression and resignation, a way leading through times of crisis and individual and collective dark nights.

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According to the Acts of the Apostles, the Church was born from the Pentecostal storm of the Spirit. She was born as a sacrament of understanding, as an "Anti-Babel."

The story of the building of the tower of Babel in the book of Genesis is a symbol of the striving for a false, totalitarian unity, an expression of human pride.

For this hubris - we read in the Bible - humanity has been punished by being wounded in a very intimate area of human existence, in the area of language, communication, and sharing. People and nations have ceased to understand each other. The symbolism of that story is still powerful.

Many towers of Babel have collapsed throughout history, but their ruins - group selfishness - have remained in people's souls.

The tragic experiences of the twentieth century include the rise and fall of the two modern towers of Babel, Hitler's Third Reich, and Stalin's Soviet Union. Both empires collapsed, but the national messianism that was at the cradle of both of them did not cease to be dangerous.

The European Union is and must remain the guarantor of the security, freedom, and prosperity of European nations and states. The fall of Hitler's empire made possible the creation of the European Union, and the fall of the Soviet empire made possible its enlargement. Putin's attack on the foundations of the international legal order strengthened

the awareness of the necessity of European unity. Attempts to weaken this unity are very dangerous and must not be tolerated.

The process of European unification needs to be constantly deepened and cultivated, not only in the political and economic domain but especially in the cultural and spiritual field. Christian churches and all faith communities have an essential mission in this field.

Many times, we have heard the sentence that Christians are "to give Europe a soul." We would misunderstand this phrase if we understood 'soul' as an ideology. Europe does not need any "Christian ideology" nostalgia for medieval 'Christian Europe.' The moral duty of Christian churches is to warn against attempts to abuse Christian symbols to spread nationalism and so-called "illiberal democracy" (that is, a non-democratic authoritarian state, "catholicism without Christianity").

The European cultural symphony needs a clear, understandable, and credible Christian voice, an inspiring example of ecumenical unity in diversity, born on the day of Pentecost as opposed to the Tower of Babel, an example of synodality - a common path of mutual listening, mutual respect, solidarity, and cooperation. We must always learn to do good and seek justice.

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**Prof. PhDr. Tomáš Halík Th.D., Dr.h.c. 2023**