

# ***The Anglican Church, La Côte. Service celebrating the Feast of St Francis – October 6, 2024***

***Message proposed by Jean-Luc Blondel***

***Peace: an illusion? A dream? Or a challenge?***

The message of today's Gospel reading (Mark 10:23-27) is no good news: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God."

Poor are the rich among us. But it is even worse, as the disciples correctly understand what Jesus means when they ask: "then who can be saved?" With this question they indicate their understanding of the message: the wealth Jesus is referring to is not only, and possibly not firstly the material goods, the money, the properties one may have. The disciples understand the profound, immense difficulty we all face. It is difficult, or better said: impossible for everyone to be saved. We all have something we do not want to lose. We are all rich in something. Later in the Mark gospel the disciples are reminding Jesus that they have left their family, their homes, to follow him. They left everything they had, and even this sacrifice is apparently not enough to enter the Kingdom of God.

We have earned goods by our work, our intelligence, our studies, and possibly a bit of luck or sometimes by an opportunistic attitude. All of this, we do not want to lose. I do not want to lose. I thank God for that what I received, what I earned, but I do not want to lose it! I trust that some of you think the same... Conclusion: the wealth we all possess keeps us far away from God's Kingdom.

After the bad news, the good news: "for mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." What a relief! We have the solution: we remain in God's hands and everything will be all right.

You will probably think: too easy, not really a responsible attitude. You are right of course. I should develop the idea. For that I turn to the topic of the day: peace. The starting point is similar: for mortals peace is impossible. Not even a dream. An illusion.

Similar to individual's wealth, communities and countries have territories, resources, gold and water, etc. We have received some of them from our fathers and mothers, from previous generations; we might have acquired others by industry, commerce and exchanges. And also, possibly - to be honest when considering the world-wide situation and history - by unjust relations, conquest or, precisely, war. I hope we agree with this general statement. Luckily enough we are not at the end of history. We are not at the end of our duties either.

I worked almost all my professional life with the International Committee of the Red Cross. I have not seen or experienced all the conflicts, the ones our world is suffering today (with some wars very close to us) or the past ones we know from reading or hearing of witnesses. I was able to bring, with colleagues, some help; some

sufferings were alleviated, some lives were saved, but the global history of humanity was, is, and possibly will remain a history of violence.

Not solely violence and war of course, but also violence and war. I do not state a philosophical or theological resigned justification for this situation, but the acceptance of a reality, and at the same time an imperative towards reaction, action, commitment for peace.

The history of Christianity is part of the history of humankind, in its positive and negative aspects. A history of sin and reconciliation, of aggression and pardon, of war and peace. Our bible is the witness of that, our own ecclesial history presents the painful reality of crusades, wars of and within religions, holy wars, so called just wars, to mention only some dimensions and justifying arguments.

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Without developing the full meaning of peace, I will simply state that peace is not only the silence of arms, but a constant striving for justice, freedoms and the preservation of Creation. To share goods, to share nature, to share resources, to jointly preserve and construct a future for coming generations, for animals, for all life on earth. Far from any kind of “just war” we are to seek a just peace.

What interests me today, the message I would like to share with you is possibly a more modest and limited goal, but an imperative one. Some of us have responsibilities in political or economic life, some might be or have been leaders in such or such enterprise or public authority, and were or are able to exert direct influence on events, including in promoting peace. But what can we do as Christians, as Church. What is possible with God’s help?

As I briefly mentioned, our Churches have not always been the best example, to say the least, in promoting peace. No religion or confession was or is exemplary.

In addition, often, yesterday and today, political leaders use religious arguments to foster their power. They present themselves as protectors of faith, defenders of the truthful religion and thus make religion a factor of tension and hatred. Conflicts might have a religious component, but they are not and should not be seen as conflicts of different faiths. We should resist by our words, prayers, public statements, the temptation to justify conflicts with religious or theological arguments. Let us not be naïve and believe the fake arguments that political or military leaders are helping God’s purposes by using our language and liturgies to pursue their evil and deadly aims.

Conflicts exist, like fire. Our duty is to avoid pouring (religious) oil to inflame them more; it is to pour water to extinguish them.

Beyond, or in addition to individual giftings and possibilities, our collective duty is to promote peace among ourselves, within our own communities, with neighboring communities of other faiths. To share and extend the spiritual patrimony of humanity in fostering encounter, dialogue, understanding in modest, humble ways.

This commitment, this long-lasting aim is probably our most credible contribution to peace among and within communities at large, and within a country and countries. If the world can see and say, like the pagans did, watching the early Christians: “See

how they love one another”, we are on the way to preaching and fostering peace beyond our own groups and churches.

Back to the beginning: it is impossible for us mortals to enter the Kingdom of God, it is impossible to make peace... without God's help. I have to add and strongly stress this point: God does not do the job in our place; he does not promote peace without our commitment. If we remain passive or, worse, continue to foster conflicts, God's peace will never reign, our humanity will never enjoy wider peaceful relations. We are, we have to be the peacemakers of God. Thus, I dare to say, reformulating the biblical passage we just read: for God all things are possible... through us. So peace is not an illusion, but a challenge for all of us.

Our life and actions can rise to the same challenge that St Francis held out: “Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”