



Reflecting on Nakba, Embracing Pentecost

Sunday, May 19th

Reflection from Fr. Paul Lansu, Board Member of Pax Christi International

Reflection on Pentecost in the context of the ongoing Nakba

Pentecost: feast of unity in diversity – Acts 2: 1-11/Jn. 20,19-23

The establishment of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948 created the Palestinian tragedy, the Nakba, the catastrophe or disaster. Now, 76 years later, war and violence continue to dominate. The true tragedy of what is happening in Gaza since 7 October 2023 lies not only in the physical destruction, but also in the loss of ethical values and humanity. There is a mad spiral of blind hatred and ruthless violence in and around Gaza that has no end in sight. There is no shortage of misery.

With Israel's recent war with Hamas in Gaza, Jewish opinion writer Rafael Baroch wrote that Israel has lost its moral compass. "Jewish ethics have been lost," he wrote. He referred to philosopher Levinas, who invites us to recognise humanity in all individuals, even those we consider enemies. Everyone's security is best guaranteed by working together and stopping making more enemies. There is no chance of a dream of security and peace for Israel until there is also one for the Palestinians. With the current inhumane situation in the Holy Land, we even so celebrate Pentecost.

At Pentecost, a new path is taken, and everything is dominated by the Holy Spirit, the constantly propelling force for good that turns to all peoples in all languages, the driving force towards unity in diversity also in the Holy Land. The love and power of the Holy Spirit gives the disciples of Jesus, and all people of good will, a second breath: a new momentum towards human dignity, peace and justice. We can learn from the Palestinians that we must take a long breath. They have a nice term for that: Sumud, perseverance.

What should we do with that Holy Spirit? What do we imagine it to be? Spontaneously, the image of the white, spotless dove arises. The dove as bringer of peace, whisperer, adviser of what is good, true and clean. An image of harmony that we better replace today with the fire of strife, violence, the confusion of hate speech and uncertainty that reigns in many hearts.

For Christians, the birth of the first church as Luke tells us in his Acts of the Apostles is a story of chaos and confusion. Broken dreams, fear for survival. It forced Jesus' friends to isolate themselves, to withdraw. Jesus, in his human form, is no longer with them. They are faced with the choice of giving up or moving on by themselves. A process of growth and learning that certainly took longer than Luke's story suggests. A story in which people learned to understand the language in which God speaks to them. Call it a language miracle - the point is that people felt addressed by the disciples' words. And recognised in them Jesus' way of living differently.

The story of Pentecost is a call to break out of isolation, breaking open one's own right, get fired up and start radically anew. This isolation can have many names and faces. Rich-poor divisions, racial hatred, walls of guns and apartheid that drive people apart or make them indifferent to each other. In the context of the ongoing Nakba, indifference is

also guilty negligence. From that indifference, Pentecost wants to liberate us: each one is different from the other and yet, as children of God, we want to know ourselves equals of each other and given to each other.

The Pentecost mission is break out of your shell. Do not remain indifferent from the other, do not lose yourself in prejudice, dare to surrender to the other who is essentially like you after all: 'This is me, who are you, I want to get to know you, what do you live by, what do you live for?' People seek connection, communities want to grow into liveable places where it is good to be. Let us hope that Israelis and Palestinians find the necessary strength to work again for unity in diversity. Variety as unity: that connects people and strives for new beginnings.

Blessed Pentecost! Fr. Paul Lansu – Pentecost 19 May 2024