

Cross of Nails - Frauenkirche 13.02.2005, 17:00 Uhr

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"For there is no discrimination: because they all sinned and fell short of the glory of God; and they are sanctified by grace gratis, and by salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. Rom. 3,23

Dear parish,

first of all at this hour, we have to say: something amazing, simply marvelous has happened among us: bloody hostility has turned to reconciliation that has become reality. On this day of commemoration we may feel spiritually joined to the Brothers and Sisters all over the world, holding and saying a prayer for us and our town; in Great Britain and America, in France and Russia and Germany live people of reconciliation. Bridges were built, and today we may add another stone, an expressive sign to the building, the Cross of Nails.

60 years ago however, the Frauenkirche was a place of horror. Death and ruin came over ten thousands of people at these nights; it was the end of the work over centuries at the face of the city of Dresden and of an overwhelmingly rich culture of the creation of life in solidarity. War returned to Germany where it had been taken from into the world. The wrongdoings were conceived and prepared in our country, later on their execution was ordered with cold blood. When the Frauenkirche collapsed, millions of people had already lost their lives, in Warsaw and Rotterdam, also in Oradour und Lidice; almost everywhere on the European continent whole strips of land were lying in ruins, the European Jews were murdered. Down to the present day people have grieved for the dear departed they lost at that time. We take a bow to the pain they experienced and still experience, and we do not discriminate the mourning people on grounds of nationality or religion.

In November 1940 German bombers had destroyed Coventry Cathedral. There were Christians who, because of the loss of their house of worship they had suffered and due to the permanent threat during war, heard the call for probation of their belief in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. The words "Father Forgive" and not "Forgive Them" were inscribed on the Sanctuary wall of the ruin. A cross was fashioned from three medieval nails which had hold the ceiling of the house of worship. The Society of the Cross of Nails had risen, connecting more than 160 places all over the world today, in the spirit of reconciliation and peace. This idea has been alive in our town since 1965, when the church of the deaconess house, later on the Kreuzkirche, followed. This community was and is a centre of power of the amazing reconciliation act, which we may witness in these years of reconstructing the Frauenkirche.

Thus, on this day basic dimensions of being human meet each other: the gift of reconciliation that has become reality – but the commemoration of the destruction through which we face the dimension of the evil, threatening us as well. At that time, at any other time, and nowadays people can make a hell in its literal sense out from this wonderful and rich creation of God, endowing us with everything we only need for life, where violence and counterviolence, retaliation and hatred represent the dominating forces. About hardly any period in history was written and searched so much like the one of the 12 years of dark dictatorship in our country and the desolate disaster that it had brought upon the world. Nevertheless, enigmas, remnants of the misunderstood, still remain. According to its literal sense, it was an evil time, and the issue of how it could come to this rage, and why they were only able to set bounds to it so late and at which price, may bring everybody endeavouring seriously, to their border of understanding. What the evil is, in what forms of expression we can encounter it – that time gives us a notion of it. It makes us shudder, even after 60 years.

Apostle Paul talks about the fact that we people are sinners. That is a discourse seeming strange to us nowadays; but it defines exactly what happened at that time: at first taking the acts of violence into consideration and therein delivering them to the power of evil, finally defencelessly suffering from a disaster never seen before. Can we be sure that something like that does not repeat, remaining a non-recurrent lapse in history? But how many wars have been carried since 1945; will be carried or planned in these days? What do the blinded want having marched through the city today? The Bible is realistic and austere when looking at us people and at the dangers we are able to provoke; it knows about its consequences. In front of God we look at being human without any make-up, and being

looked like that, every self-assurance starts to stagger. In view of reality of the evil, it is reckless to believe without trouble that we will stand the dangers for living together and the challenges in our time. We fall short of the glory of God. We all have sinned, that is true, at any time.

Living peacefully together in Europe since these, has become possible only because there is – to our great profit and to our salvation – also that alternative possibility – because people are also able to be peaceful and become reconciled and converge in this spirit. But how does it come to that? How can we apprehend reconciliation? By living peacefully? And maybe even more important, how can we commit our lives steadily to this spirit and defend against this permanent danger?

These are questions which have also been of great, decisive importance to the Society of the Cross of Nails. At the beginning of them the prayer "Father forgive" is placed, the plea for mercy is pronounced by the one who views the limit of his own abilities. The one who knows about the impossibility of living without blame and who knows from his own life the necessity to defend oneself against bitterness and hatred.

Apostle Paul talks about two ways offering us people salvation in and for our lives. At first there is the way of the law, of moral effort, of the everlasting try to be noble, helpful and good. That is a way we can only talk about in deference and respect. – But in the view of the world and the evil involved in it, in the view of the power of sin this is not sufficiently acceptable to the apostle. He considers this way as an illusion trusting too much in the fact that we will resist temptation. No, says Paul, all our efforts wont suffice to win an undamaged life. The way of morale, of truly following the law is based on the illusionary assumption of human capabilities, he considers too little the power of the evil. Nobody indeed is able to escape from it. There is no life without guilt, and our miscarriage of the moral claims does not have the characteristics of slips happening incidentally, being of no importance. They rather mark the places where we miss undamaged life and where the evil befalls us. We all sinned, says Paul. Therefore only the way of the gospel can lead us to salvation: God's gift to the people according to the belief in gratefully accepting – Christ, crucified and risen, the one who, acting for us, suffered from the evil without clinging to it. The crucifix shows God as human being, suffering in a way only human beings are able to – from the senseless tumult of that time, being unguilty at the mercy of evil powers threatening life. The one who looks at the crucifix, recognizes God's urgent will of reconciliation.

Since God wants to reach his aim, reconciliation, he did not leave the last word to death; and Christ has risen, having overcome the evil powers, salvation happens. Through the belief we gain an interest in it, our salvation and life. Being reconciled with God we can live a life of reconciliation crossing all separating borders, bringing about peace, indeed.

Dear parish, the Jesus Christ happening is God's great healing offer we can trust and admit to, in believing and believing only. The one who accepts it, relies on God who mercifully turns to us, – and lives and acts from this belief. By that we can succeed with reconciliation and peace as we are allowed to experience it.

That shows the Cross of Nails — placed on the altar of the Frauenkirche, we will look upon. At Christmas in 1940, six weeks after the destruction of Coventry Cathedral, praepositus Howard said: "We want to build a more pleasant, Christian world with those who are our enemies today." These were prophetic words. We thank God for them, and for the blessing grown out of them.