

## Prayer as a Source of Peace

I would like to begin by thanking the organizers of the Sant'Egidio meeting in Rome for their tireless work of dialogue. It is good to be together with peacemakers from so many different backgrounds, while war is again raging on the European continent.

I have been invited to speak on a topic that is very dear to us in Taizé: "Prayer as a source of peace." To begin with, I would like to recall two important moments in the recent history of the Church and of interreligious dialogue. The first moment was, in 1986, the meeting of the various religious traditions in Assisi at the invitation of Pope John Paul II to pray for peace. It is this intuition that the Community of Sant'Egidio has pursued over the years, thus maintaining the spirit of Assisi through dialogue between religions and cultures. And this seems to me, in fact, more urgent than ever.

The second moment I would like to recall is the prayer for peace initiated by Pope Francis in June 2014, to which he then associated Patriarch Bartholomew and Israeli and Palestinian political leaders. Here is the beginning of this invocation that I would like to repeat this morning: "Lord God of peace, hear our supplication! We have tried so many times and for so many years to resolve our conflicts with our forces and also with our weapons; so many moments of hostility and darkness; so much bloodshed; so many broken lives, so many buried hopes.... But our efforts have been in vain. Now, Lord, help us! Give us peace, teach us peace, guide us to peace."

This event has had a lasting effect on our life as a community, because since then, every Sunday at 8pm, the brothers have been meeting in the Church of Reconciliation in Taizé for half an hour of silent prayer for peace.

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How can prayer be a source of peace? To this question, I think we can give several beginnings of an answer. First of all, we pray because as believers we feel the urgent need to turn to the Lord in the most difficult situations of our lives, both personal and collective. In this respect, prayer for peace is a profound link between our various religious traditions.

Secondly, as Christians, it is also to Christ Jesus that we address our ardent supplication. As the apostle Paul said to the Ephesians, it is he, Christ, who "came to proclaim the good news of peace, peace for you who were far away, peace for those who were near." (Eph 2). Through his life, his cross and his resurrection, Christ Jesus "is our peace."

Prayer for peace has yet another quality: it makes us, in a very concrete way, responsible for one another. In the words of the great Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, "nothing is more responsible than to pray." For prayer can only lead us to a concrete effort of solidarity for our neighbor.

The last element that I would like to mention is the intimate aspect of prayer for peace. A great saint of the East, Seraphim of Sarov, said: "Acquire the spirit of peace, and then thousands of souls will be saved around you." Now, can the spirit of peace be acquired in any other way than through the long maturation process that takes place in prayer?

We are living through a period in which polarizations are exacerbated and tend to aggravate divisions, both in our societies and in the Church. In this context, prayer enables us to keep the doors of dialogue open, even with those who think differently from us. We have been talking about this over the last few months with the young people who visit us in Taizé, starting from a text that I have called "Becoming creators of unity."

It seems to me that making unity grow requires a commitment of our whole being, which begins in our own hearts. In the words of an ancient psalm, our prayer can then ascend to God: "Unify my heart to worship your name" (Ps 86:11).

Yes, there is in us a deep thirst for communion and unity that comes from God, and in prayer we can express it. Even with very few words, remaining in the silence of a one-on-one relationship with God is essential for us to participate, very humbly, in his work of peace on earth.

But in prayer, it is also God who turns to us and offers us to walk with him. Brother Roger, who initiated our community life in Taizé, once wrote on this subject: "Knowing that God listens to us, understands us, forgives us: this is one of the sources of peace... and we come closer to a healing of the heart." Thus, prayer is also a source of peace, because God comes there more than anywhere else to soothe and heal the heart of the person who turns to him with confidence.

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In the context of the war that is raging in the Ukraine and in many other places in the world, some people find it difficult to pray for peace. Let us make it clear: by such a prayer, it is not a question of asking for an easy peace that gives by default the victory to the aggressor, but rather the true and demanding peace that requires, in order to be lasting, that it be accompanied by justice and truth.

Yes, praying for peace is more urgent than ever. We are experiencing it here these days and I would like to propose to you to remain a moment praying silently for peace. We can turn together to the living God and raise again to him this invocation of Pope Francis, which comes from so many hearts: "Lord God of peace, hear our supplication! Give us peace, teach us peace, guide us to peace."