

WITNESSES OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Remembering the three weeks that most of the Claretian martyrs of Barbastro remained imprisoned in the assembly hall of the Piarist school in that city, several questions come to mind. What feelings surfaced in their hearts during those days? What persons appeared in their memory when they sensed it would be impossible to meet them again? How did they see those who had detained them and watched over their imprisonment? Why so much hatred against the Church and against those who confessed to be followers of Jesus?

Indeed, they asked themselves this question and much more. They tried to understand. We do not know if they succeeded ultimately. However, from what they themselves wrote or from what those who witnessed their journey to martyrdom told us, we know that they died forgiving and wished for a world in which all would feel that they were brothers and sisters, and this fraternity would be lived concretely. It was a strong desire, emerging from the depths of the hearts of people who, sustained by their faith, faced an unjust death without hating those who had condemned them without trial. When hatred sows death, faith and forgiveness become sources of life and hope, instruments for establishing true justice for all.

Forgiveness makes possible lasting peace and justice for all. In any case, "reconciliation" does not mean forgetting an injustice, but overcoming evil with good, as Jesus teaches us (cf. Mt. 5:38-45) or as the Apostle Paul tells us: "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil by doing good. Pope Francis writes in the encyclical "Fratelli Tutti": "Forgiveness does not entail allowing oppressors to keep trampling on their own dignity and that of others, or letting criminals continue their wrongdoing. Those who

suffer injustice have to defend strenuously their own rights and those of their family, precisely because they must preserve the dignity they have received as a loving gift from God". (FT. 241). And the Pope continues in the next number: "The important thing is not to fuel anger, which is unhealthy for our own soul and the soul of our people, or to become obsessed with taking revenge and destroying the other... We cannot come to terms and unite for the sake of revenge, or treating others with the same violence with which they treated us, or plotting opportunities for retaliation under apparently legal auspices. Nothing is gained this way, and in the end, everything is lost" (FT 242).

Visiting the museum that keeps the memory of the Claretian martyrs of Barbastro alive is an invitation to think about the origin of violence and the consequences it entails. The best service that can be rendered to the one who has caused others to suffer unjustly is to strongly wish for their conversion and help make it possible.

It is not easy to believe that love is the only way to help overcome hatred and heal the wounds it leaves in the hearts of individuals and the memory of people or that forgiveness is the only instrument capable of bringing about true reconciliation and building peace for which humanity yearns. There is always the temptation to impose it by force.

Let Pope Francis speak to us again: Those who truly forgive do not forget. Instead, they choose not to yield to the same destructive force that caused them so much suffering. They break the vicious circle; they halt the advance of the forces of destruction. They choose not to spread in society the spirit of revenge that will sooner or later return to take its toll" (FT 251). "Forgiveness is precisely what enables us to pursue justice without falling into a spiral of revenge or the injustice of forgetting" (FT 252).

We all long for peace. The visit to this memorial museum helps us discover how

to reach this goal. The Claretian martyrs of Barbastro knew how to forgive. They desired a world without hatred and violence. They were witnesses of peace and reconciliation.

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