

SERVING JUSTICE AND PEACE IS AN IMPERATIVE TASK OF THE CHURCH

Vatican City, 16 September 2012 (VIS) - This morning in Beirut, Lebanon, Benedict XVI celebrated Mass at the City Centre Waterfront, a coastal area reclaimed from the sea using the debris of buildings in the old centre of Beirut, which were demolished at the end of the Civil War prior to the reconstruction.

The Holy Father travelled by car from the apostolic nunciature in Harissa, then covered the final stretch along the seafront from Jounieh in popemobile. He was greeted on arrival by the mayor of Beirut who presented him with the keys to the city. The Mass was attended by many thousands of faithful, the Lebanese authorities and 300 bishops from all over the Middle East. The liturgy was celebrated in Arabic, French and Latin.

In his homily the Pope commented on today's reading from the Gospel of St. Mark in which the true identity of Jesus is revealed. In Mark's narrative, Jesus is walking with His disciples along the road leading to the villages in the region of Caesarea Philippi when He asks them: "Who do people say that I am?"

"The moment He chose to ask this question is not insignificant", the Holy Father explained. "Jesus was facing a decisive turning-point in His life. He was going up to Jerusalem, to the place where the central events of our salvation would take place: His crucifixion and resurrection. In Jerusalem too, following these events, the Church would be born".

In the episode, after Peter has proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, Christ tells the disciples that He must suffer and be put to death before rising again. "He realises that people could use this answer to advance agendas which are not His, to raise false temporal hopes in His regard. He does not let Himself be confined to the attributes of the human saviour which many were expecting", the Pope said.

"Jesus wants to make them understand His true identity. He is a Messiah Who suffers, a Messiah Who serves, and not some triumphant political saviour. He is the Servant Who obeys His Father's will, even to giving up His life. ... Jesus thus contradicts the expectations of many. What He says is shocking and disturbing. We can understand the reaction of Peter who rebukes Him, refusing to accept that his Master should suffer and die! Jesus is stern with Peter; He makes him realise that anyone who would be His disciple must become a servant, just as He became Servant".

Therefore, the Pope went on, "following Jesus means taking up one's cross and walking in His footsteps, along a difficult path which leads not to earthly power or glory but, if necessary, to self-abandonment, to losing one's life for Christ and the Gospel in order to save it. We are assured that this is the way to the resurrection, to true and definitive life with God". In this context, Benedict pointed out that the Year of Faith, due to begin on 11 October is an invitation to "each member of the faithful to renew his or her commitment to undertaking this path of sincere conversion. Throughout this Year, then, I strongly

encourage you to reflect more deeply on the faith, to appropriate it ever more consciously and to grow in fidelity to Christ Jesus and His Gospel.

"Brothers and sisters, the path on which Jesus wishes to guide us is a path of hope for all. Jesus' glory was revealed at the very time when, in His humanity, He seemed weakest, particularly through the incarnation and on the cross. This is how God shows His love; He becomes our servant and gives Himself to us".

Benedict XVI then turned his attention to the second reading, in which St. James states that, if our adherence to Jesus is to be authentic, it requires "concrete actions. ... It is an imperative task of the Church to serve and of Christians to be true servants in the image of Jesus", he said. "Consequently, in a world where violence constantly leaves behind its grim trail of death and destruction, to serve justice and peace is urgently necessary for building a fraternal society, for building fellowship! ... I pray in particular that the Lord will grant to this region of the Middle East servants of peace and reconciliation, so that all people can live in peace and with dignity. This is an essential testimony which Christians must render here, in cooperation with all people of good will. I appeal to all of you to be peacemakers, wherever you find yourselves".

Likewise, the Pope went on, "service must also be at the heart of the life of the Christian community itself. Every ministry, every position of responsibility in the Church, is first and foremost a service to God and to our brothers and sisters. This is the spirit which should guide the baptised among themselves, and find particular expression in an effective commitment to serving the poor, the outcast and the suffering, so that the inalienable dignity of each person may be safeguarded.

"Dear brothers and sisters who are suffering physically or spiritually", the Holy Father added concluding his homily, "your sufferings are not in vain! Christ the Servant wished to be close to the suffering. ... Along your own path, may you always find brothers and sisters who are concrete signs of His loving presence which will never forsake you! Remain ever hopeful because of Christ!".

"May God bless Lebanon; may He bless all the peoples of this beloved region of the Middle East, and may He grant them the gift of His peace".

You can find more information at: www.visnews.org