

"Unity on the paths of Salvation History".

5th Lenten Conference of the Heart of Mary Shrine in Carvalhos, Pedroso, Vila Nova de Gaia

Speaker: Mr. Jorge Ferreira da Costa Ortiga, Archbishop Emeritus of the Braga Diocese

On March 26, the 5th Lenten Conference was held at the Coração de Maria Shrine, with Mr. Jorge Ferreira da Costa Ortiga, Archbishop Emeritus of the Braga Diocese, as the speaker. José Manuel Cruz introduced the speaker and the event opened with a song performed by Fernanda, Paulo and David.

D. Jorge Ortiga began by referring to the urgency of unity among people, especially in the troubled times we live in, marked by war, inequality and isolation. He explained that every person, especially the Christian, has the obligation to be a builder of unity, because only in this way will there be peace, equality and respect for the dignity of the human person.

The connecting thread that the speaker gave to his talk was a passage through various scenarios in Sacred Scripture that show how God leads humanity towards unity, that is, that express unity in the history of Salvation. Before going into the scenarios, he explained that the Bible has difficulty in giving a name to God, a God who is tenderness, who loves with maternal love, gentle, faithful, friend, a God whom Jesus calls father ("Abba"). He pointed out that this is revealed in several scenarios described in Scripture.

In the first scenario, Bishop Ortiga presented the account of the creation of the human being, giving special emphasis to the text from Genesis: "God created man in his own image, he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen 1:27). He explained that from this it follows that man and woman together, a male and female human being, are the image of God; God created them to be happy together in the garden of Eden. But then came disobedience.

D. Jorge Ortiga then referred to the second scenario, in which after the disobedience of the human being, God takes the initiative to make a project to bring man back to the "garden" that had been destroyed, highlighting the word "Covenant" in this way of restoring unity. He pointed out that in this project is inscribed the covenant with Noah, later on Mount Sinai and in Egypt with Moses. "You shall be my people and I will be your God" (cf. Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 30:22). This statement is the substance of the Covenant, a new unity for humanity to return to happiness. But once again disobedience has taken its revenge.

The speaker pointed out that God's project did not stop, and people began to speak of a "New Covenant", of someone who would come to rebuild unity. He explained that, nevertheless, two models of Covenant appeared in the Scriptures. On the one hand, the city of Babel, which is the city of uniformity, in which God is dispensed with and men by themselves ("building a tower up to heaven") thought they would get along, live in peace and be happy, in a society marked by hierarchies of power. But humanity is made of plurality, and uniformity is a tyranny that cannot be endured, resulting in division and dispersion. On the other side is the city of Jerusalem, which is the city of unity, where God descends to earth, a God-Love who comes to establish unity. It is Jesus, the Son of God, who comes to bring about the New Covenant.

At this point, D. Jorge Ortiga introduces his listeners to the third biblical scenario. For this, he indicates that there are two moments in the life of Jesus: one in which he "speaks" and which ends just before the Last Supper with the "priestly prayer" - which is also seen as the "testimony"

of Jesus to his followers - and another moment in which he "does", translated into Calvary, when he dies for humanity. When Jesus "speaks", he asks "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in me and I in you; so that they may be in us, and the world may believe that You have sent me." (John 17:21) This is done before Jesus gives His life for humanity, that is, before Jesus makes unity through His death.

Hence, for the speaker, the Church has to be a sign of unity because that is the "mandate" it has from Jesus. The Calvary of Jesus is a "programme" to bring about unity: Jesus gives his life so that his disciples may be capable of being builders of unity.

D. Jorge Ortega pointed out that sometimes we think it is impossible "to be of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32), since the Church has had various moments of lack of unity, but this is not a utopia for Christians, since it was made concrete in the primitive Church of Jerusalem. In this regard, he moved on to the fourth scenario, the early Church, which is described in the first pages of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, in which the first disciples lived together, without inequalities, in great harmony and joy, despite their different personalities, their different points of view on various aspects. For the speaker, the disciples did not remain at Calvary, but moved on to the Resurrection because they saw Christ alive in every person. The Archbishop Emeritus, Jorge Ortega, believes, therefore, that through the gift of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism it is possible to build unity, despite people's tendency to division. In his view, we were not made for uniformity, but for plurality, we are all different (and fortunately so), but through the action of the Holy Spirit we are capable of unity, of speaking the same language (unlike Babel): the language of Love that leads to unity. He recalled that Pope Francis asks us to listen to one another and build unity, which is urgent in today's world: a world of disposable people, full of inequalities, misery, conflicts. Christians in particular are called to work for unity: "just as I have loved you" (John 13, 34).

Then Mgr Jorge Ortega posed the question: "How can we build unity? ", and answered with five words indicated by Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium": i) "primeiriari" - a neologism that means that each one must be the first to come forward in the face of the pain and suffering of others, even if taking the first step is difficult; ii) get involved - it is not enough to observe, to denounce, it is necessary to enter into the problems of others, of society and to actively participate in change; iii) to walk with the people - to accompany the other, to be beside him; iv) to bear fruit - from the three previous elements emanate fruit, the problems are no longer immersed in solitude and unity appears; v) - to celebrate - and then we have to celebrate together.

The speaker concluded by indicating that the hymn of unity is Love and that God gave humanity a model, His mother Mary. The love of Mary was the last scenario that D. Jorge Ortega explained, affirming that the love of Mary is knowing how to be together, more than talking (as it was at the wedding of Cana and Calvary). In this regard, he recalled a different image of Mary as Our Lady of Sorrows, which he saw in a shrine near Avila, in which Mary was sculpted with a towel in her hands, perhaps to wipe away the tears of those in need. It is, from his point of view, a good example that Mary invites us to imitate.

Finally, the speaker told a short story, demonstrating that unity is built with love and that love is often silence. Briefly, it was about a couple who, at various difficult moments in their relationship, left the letters NEQTA written for their spouse to see, which caused great astonishment to the children, who never dared to ask what they meant. One day, one of the spouses having passed away, they finally asked the other the meaning of the expression NEQTA,

who replied: "Do not forget that I love you", and explained to them that when they got married they had agreed that they would always write it to the other in difficult moments.

Thus, D. Jorge Ortiga finished his "sharing", exhorting us to always make unity - NEQTA -, because only in this way there will be Easter.

Then Fernanda, Paulo and David sang a second song, whose lyrics somehow echoed the message left by the speaker: "send your Spirit of Love and Peace (...) only you Lord, only by you Lord we will renew the earth...".

Father Marçal closed the cycle of conferences by thanking the speaker, the collaborators and the numerous audience for the strong adherence and left the challenge of never ceasing to have the serenity to live in an elevated way, seeking to know more and to take to life the good things we have learned from each other.

José Manuel Cruz