

Homily for the Peace Vigil for the Democratic Republic of the Congo December 30, 2022

We are gathered in fellowship because we believe in God's power to bring reconciliation and Peace to our beloved country, Congo. We are also confident that every problem finds a solution if we try hard enough with the right attitude and an open-ended commitment to see it through. In this holy mass, the climax of our vigil prayer, we are reminded that true Peace comes from God, who touches and reconciles souls, who mends and restores broken relationships and hearts to human wholeness.

Despite the political stalemate on the ground, we cannot allow ourselves to be overwhelmed or locked into the adversities that fuel and escalate the long-running conflict in the country. We are all aware of the pain and sufferings vulnerable communities across DR Congo have faced and continue to endure. Day in, and day out, innocent Congolese citizens, women, and children continually experience the scourge of plunder, victimization, annexation, and brutalities of all sorts. Enough is enough. There must and should be a way to break the cycle of violence that maims and kills God's children.

So, as Christians, believers, and people of faith and goodwill, we want to draw from the treasuries of our long tradition of peacemaking and peacebuilding to offer creative ways to promote and restore Peace. Our way, arguably the best, is Christ's paradigm of Peace for humanity. "I have come, so they have life and have it in fullness." Christ's offer of Peace leaves no one behind. It is inclusive, comprehensive, and caters to all.

This peace vigil is a testimony to our shared dream of Peace for the fullness of God's Peace to dawn for the people of DR Congo. As he said in (John 14: 27) "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I gift it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid*".

These words of Jesus are closely related to the commissioning of the apostles after his resurrection from the Dead. Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Again Jesus said, "*Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" And with that, he breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*"

We see here the importance of the Holy Spirit in the vital mission of the Apostles. It is by the power of the Spirit that we can achieve what the world cannot accomplish, namely forgiveness, which paves the way for genuine reconciliation.

Forgiveness, as a host of religious and social scientists contend, is a conscious and deliberate decision to let go of feelings of resentment or revenge toward any person or group of people who have hurt you, regardless of whether they deserve your forgiveness or not. By and large, forgiveness is unconditional and can only be inspired by love.

Here the invitation to forgiveness finds all its meaning. Thus, we must understand that Jesus never promised an easy way to Peace, especially in DR Congo, where communities faced decades of exploitation and the loss of their loved ones. It means that adversities and challenges might sometimes derail the peace process, but we should not give up.

The Peace that Jesus gives us through the presence of the Holy Spirit is the Peace that comes from conquering our selfish and vested interests that undermine the way to Peace and reconciliation. It reminds us of the sanctity of life and our shared responsibility to nurture and care for one another. Ultimately, True *Peace* is not man-made but a gift of the Holy Spirit that we must pray for and work for at all times.

So let us give Peace a chance, for Peace is patriotic. As Pope Francis once said:

“Peace, which is our obligation, is, first of all, a gift of God.” *“No sin, no failure, no grudge should discourage us from working for peace.”*

May this peace vigil sow the seed that will grow into a peace tree for all to enjoy its fruits.

Amen

Fr. Bazemo, M.Afr