

Is peace possible?

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Those who have studied history at school often remember being bored and disaffected by the many dates they had to memorize to be able to pass a test or the end-of-year exam: dates which were almost always related to great victories or great defeats, in short, dates that marked wars. The different stages, in fact, into which the eras of history are conventionally divided, are often delineated according to events of war such as the collapse of the Roman Empire or the fall of Constantinople.

There is an idea that the world can only progress through war. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, 6th-5th century BC, said that "war is the mother of all things". And there is no shortage of historians who point to it as a necessary condition or even a source of progress, from Thomas Hobbes to some in the present day. The historian, Ian Morris, for example, considers it "though indisputably terrible, it is a necessary and lesser evil in the process of civilization"¹. And who can deny it if, since the world has been the world – since Cain killed Abel – this seems to be the reality?

And yet, in the heart of every human being there is also the yearning for goodness, for the infinite, for the eternal that war seems intent on defeating. This is perhaps because in the history of humanity there was one event which has marked its course: the incarnation of the Word, of the Son of God. Jesus has established a new creation. He has made us children of God, thus giving human beings of every time the ability and possibility to follow another path, a path that, slowly and laboriously, will be able to lead to universal fraternity.

All religions carry within them longings for peace and well-being, including Christianity. In a special way, though, it has had to make its way through various periods of turmoil and be conditioned by human weakness. It has not always been a vehicle of peace. Yet, the values that have flourished from it (love, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, to name but a few) have clearly spread to every level of its existence and influence. In a certain sense, Christianity has also contributed decisively to the construction of some of the longest experiences of peace, after centuries of bloody struggles, as is the case with the European Union. But there are also experiences of lasting peace in civilizations that are inspired by other religions as is the case in certain regions of China and India.

It means that peace is possible, that we can and must fight to change the course of what seems inevitable.

But, if we look at Jesus' teaching, it is symptomatic that, when he speaks of the kingdom of God, he compares it to a mustard seed, to the leaven that a woman puts in flour to make bread... He knows who we are, he knows the impulses and depths which can occur in the human soul, the consequences of which he too would have to suffer with his atrocious death on the cross... Jesus does not invite us to take up arms or to fight against invincible giants, but to make small gestures, we could say, to "sow" peace. Sowing is an art, it requires patience, effort, waiting. Hence the title of this issue!

But then the mustard seed becomes a tree and the yeast makes a good bread. So we must not be satisfied with sowing. It is also important to ensure that peace grows and develops. In addition to the sowing that we can do, it is up to each of us, where we are, not to stop fighting for peace: with concrete actions, promoting development that fights social inequalities, seeking the truth, moving public opinion...

Sometimes everything begins with deep listening, which allows one to understand and open up to the other, establishing a dialogue that goes beyond any attempt at polarization or opposition. And so sparks of peace are created!

This issue of *Ekklesia* offers a series of articles in this vein: in-depth studies, good practices, testimonies, small contributions for the construction of a true peace which begins with those who sow and with that Someone who will be able to make it grow – night and day, how, we don't know...² – until it reaches maturity.

¹ Ian Morris, *War! What Is It Good For? Conflict and the Progress of Civilization from Primates to Robots*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2024; quoted in «Il Giornale», article by Matteo Sacchi of 7 January 2024.

² Cf. *Mk* 4:26-27: "The kingdom of God is like a man who sows seed in the ground; whether he sleeps or wakes, by night or by day, the seed sprouts and grows; how, he himself does not know."

