

Caravita Rome

October 28, 2014

Feast of Saint Simon and Jude

Ecumenical evensong

Isaiah 4, 2-6 - John 14, 15-31a

'Heil Hitler!'. The blasphemy cannot be greater. The SS-officer was greeting Sister Edith Stein in the parlour of **her Carmelite** monastery in **Echt in** the Netherlands. It is 1942. Edith Stein is German citizen but also from born from Jewish parents. Jewish born people are scapegoat for all **that** went wrong in **German** society. That was the reason why mother superior sent her to the Netherlands, **which was thought to remain a neutral country**. But **as the Netherlands were occupied by Germany, the Nazis found her** and deported to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, where she was put to death.

'Blessed be Jesus Christ!', sister Edith answered. With the same words the sisters greet one another and all other people they meet every new morning. The contrast **with the greeting by the SS officer is huge**. Two people who express in whom they trust. I don't know if the **soldier** was aware of the system to which he contributed by his service, but I can not believe he was really happy with the developments he was compelled to support. How much frustration someone has to carry and how angry someone has to be before surrendering oneself to this kind of inhuman system?

In this greeting in the morning a confrontation was taking place, the confrontation between two different answers **to** the question in whom **you** put **your** trust.

Edith Stein did not want to quit Germany **at all**. **She** had loved to be with **those** who were **the** most vulnerable. **But in the end**, she shared the same fate as all others who are from the wrong colour or race or idea, notwithstanding her obedient emigration to a foreign country. "Blessed be Jesus Christ": in a world where the murder **of** fellow human beings was promoted to the level of 'a solution', sister Edith knew there was only one who merits it to be promoted above all other human beings. And that is Jesus. Why? Because in Jesus God's love is breaking through the clouds of human frustration and anger. "Blessed be Jesus Christ": Edith Stein's fate became a sign of solidarity and of love. By undergoing her fate without bowing for the violence of the system of desperation, **and by** fostering her relation to the Lord, she made God's world more beautiful and more human. Her life and death overcame desperation and anger.

I tell this story of this martyr of the 20th century, because we celebrate two other martyrs today: Simon and Judas. Simon, the Cananaen, belonged to those people who protested against the tax measures of the Roman Empire. And Simon Thadaeus **is** the combative writer of the last letter in the New Testament. Both of them were zealous disciples of the Lord who were involved in the proclamation of the Gospel during many years after the death **of Christ** on the Cross. Both of them died as martyrs.

And I tell those stories because of the many martyrs who shared the same fate in our times. Let me mention bishop Alberto Ramento, a bishop of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, who was murdered

eight years ago because of his commitment to justice for the landworkers. And it is obvious we can add many, many names to this list. And let us also today not forget our brothers and sisters in the Middle East, who are suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Life is about surrendering yourself. The critical question all martyrs confront us with is this: who or what is worthy of our investment in them? In other words: to whom do we belong? The interesting message of today's gospel is that it shows that there is another question that precedes that one. Indeed there is first someone who wants to belong to us. By his words in his speech to the disciples Jesus makes clear that He and His Father are ready to reveal themselves to us. Revealing yourself to someone is to entrust yourself to that person. Therefore this message is quite revolutionary: God who wants to reveal himself to human beings. In these words of Jesus God is begging for shelter as a homeless person is looking for a shelter every night. It is a typical theme of the fourth gospel, for already the prologue tells us that the Word is 'sheltering' among us.

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (v. 22)

Indeed, it is impossible to be hosted by someone who doesn't love you. Therefore the Lord is looking for people who love him in order to be hosted by them. To love someone means to be at the disposal of the welfare of that fellow human being. To love God is to be free for promoting God's future and the future of God's dream of love and solidarity, of being healed from desperation and distress, the dream of God's shalom. God is looking for hospitable people to whom God can reveal this dream as the core of God's heart and with whom this dream will be save because of their commitment to it.

These verses tell us about being church. Indeed, the church is God's shelter in this world where God's dream is safe because of us, who want to be at the disposal of this dream. Just as Jesus offered himself as a shelter for God and his dream. The church as the body of Christ is called to offer itself as a shelter, because otherwise God would be an orphan and homeless. But in celebrating the sacraments, and especially in celebrating the Eucharist, we welcome God and God's dream of shalom in our midst and in the world. We are offering God the shelter God is looking for. Because of God's presence we have the opportunity to be guided by God in our lives. Offering your hospitality will be answered by the fact that we ourselves will learn from our guest. That's what John means by the annunciation of the 'the Advocate' who will come to us. The Advocate is God self, as professor and guide for life, as educator.

This all means that the church can become a place where God's shalom can already be experienced: the fullness of life of God's community in which the Eternal One wants us to share. In the church people can experience that (or: how?) reconciliation is possible. In the church they discover that a life without fear is no longer an illusion, that it is possible for people to respect one another and to live in solidarity. The church as "a pavillon, a shade by day from the heat, and refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain", as Isaiah calls it, a pavillon, a refuge and a shelter for God and all God's beloved who are looking for the realisation of God's dream of shalom.

But is this not too idealistic? Isn't there a lot of fear in the churches? Isn't there a lot of fear in our ecumenical relationships? Do'nt we see each other sometimes as a threat to our own security and to our own truth? The message of today's gospel is that not our personal truths are important, but only our readiness to offer a shelter to the Triune God, as Abraham did for the angels who passed by. For

the Gospel the truth is far from an abstract reality, truth is about a community **that** is free to shelter God and his dream of shalom. Once that readiness is there, it will turn out that this divine guest will guide us. **Then** the shelter we offered **to Him** will turn out to be the shelter **in which we ourselves** are safe. That kind of mutually hosting is **true** intimacy. That intimacy is offered to us in today's gospel. That intimacy has to be the starting point of all ecumenical work and discussions as well, and I am convinced that **if we do so, we would** make more progress than **we've** ever **imagined ...**

On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you. (20)

“Blessed be Jesus Christ!”