

September 10, 2015

HOMILY OF THE MILITARY ARCHBISHOP OF SPAIN

Dear members of the International Military Apostolate (AMI), Authorities, beloved brothers and sisters:

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. The words of the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Colossae we have just listened, provide us with a perfect closing to this Assembly, in which we have celebrated half a century of proclaiming and bearing witness of our catholic faith, in the international military environment.

1. This Apostolate, that is you, were born in this sacramental signs city, under the caring glance of the Apostle James, to spread the ideals of the catholic militaries both in the Armed Forces and in the public life. Along these fifty years, you have been feeling proud of your military vocations, based on the unshakable grounds of freedom, defense, justice and peace of your peoples. However, this is not all. You also have had, as persons, the experience of what the intimacy of meeting Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, means. He is the One that fulfills the longings the human heart harbors. Saint James the Greater gave his life for Him, like so many persecuted Christians today do. All of them confess that he is "the Prince of the Peace".
2. Men and women of good crave for the gift of peace. This is the great hope of peoples and countries of the Earth. Nevertheless, we are well aware of the existence of evil and ambition, which ravage peace, persons and nations. Hence, the Public Powers have the the duty, and the right, to foster the defense, to keep the integrity and independence of the nations. This requires persons and material means to preserve and protect the fundamental individual and collective rights. Belonging to the Armed Forces and State Security Corps is coherent with the commitment of being builders of peace. In addition, the Christian militaries know that they must live their professional dedication to the Homeland from the evangelical Jesus' commandment of love: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (John 15, 13).

3. The History of Salvation tells us about the drama of the Grace and the Sin. Sin is what brings us division, dissensions, grudges and, ultimately, war. When the person forgets his Creator and Lord, unavoidably falls in Cain's argument: Why should I care? *Am I my brother's keeper?* (Gn 4, 9). This is why Pope Francis told us last year in Redipuglia (Italy): "War is madness (...) War does not look directly at anyone, be they elderly, children, mothers, fathers... What does it matter to me?" (9-13-2014). Only in God lies the peace's eternal spring!
4. The Old Testament testifies that, when Israel went away from Yaveh's Alliance, defeat and misfortune followed. For the Israelite believer, then, the peace was the fruit of the justice in his relation with God and the brothers. In the New Testament, the gift of peace has a name: "Emmanuel" (God with us). His Redeeming Incarnation made possible a peace utterly different from the one the world can produce: the fruit of his total donation to the humanity in the sacrifice of the Cross. The song of joy of the Heavenly Legions in the joyful night of Bethlehem, *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests*, (Lk 2,14), strikingly agrees with the words *Peace be with you* (Lk 24, 36), the Risen Lord greeted the fearful disciples' community with. They had endured the war the powerful waged against the Son of God, hence to them. The Paschal Event overcame all the hindrances to the personal and community peace: *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh* (Eph 2, 13-14).
5. However, two thousand years later, one has the impression that the world has never enjoyed a period of full peace. The news of so many crimes, massacres and wars, both far and near, might argue against Christ's title of Prince's of the Peace. However, can we rationally think that the One who died in Cross for our salvation wanted to force his peace without counting on us, so undermining our freedom? Did He not choose to need our efforts to achieve the yearned reign of Peace on Earth? Or, rather, would Peace not be a task and a duty each of us can, and must, make contributions to

with our actions, be them be small or big? Saint Gregory Nazianzen said "Peace is a good recommended to all, but kept only by a few". What is the reason for it? Possibly, the desire of dominance, or the ambition, or envy or of the loathing of the neighbor, or something else which we check in those who do not know the Lord " (Catena Aurea IV). In Pope Francis' words: "Here and in other cemeteries lie many victims. ... How is this possible? ... It is so because in today's world, behind the scenes, there are interests, geopolitical strategies, lust for money and power, and there is the manufacture and sale of arms, which seem to be so important! ... And these plotters of terrorism, these schemers of conflicts, just like arms dealers, have engraved in their hearts, "What does it matter to me?". " (Redipuglia (Italy) 9.13.2014).

6. You have worked as an Organization the last fifty years just to fight this ignorance the Bishop of Rome speaks of: "What do I mind?". You have exchanged ideas, carried activities on and shared experiences thought to promote peace and understanding between the nations represented here. And you did that through the the living inspiration of the Gospels, of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church and of the Ecumenical Dialog. Pope Saint John Paul II defined you as "Sentries of Peace". During five decades you have worked hard to make real what the first reading says: *in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God* (Col 3, 16) Moreover, in your meetings during this half century, you have positively answered to the number 79 of the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" of Vatican-II Council, where those who serve in the armies of the nations are called to consider themselves as servants of the security and the freedom of the peoples. In this way, they contribute to build the Peace through the correct fulfilling of their functions.
7. Today, as always, the Lord needs persons to spread the Gospel to all nations. In addition, they must pray and work for a better world, namely the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace, freedom, fraternity and love. Courage! The Lord needs tireless witnesses of his presence and of his healing actions over men and women! Religion is

not the cause of the wars. It is the use of God's Name in vain and the denial of the right to religious freedom!.. Pope Benedict XVI said: "It should be clear that religious fundamentalism and secularism are alike in that both represent extreme forms of a rejection of legitimate pluralism and the principle of secularity." (Message. World Day of Peace. Rome 1-1-2011). The beautiful experience of these five decades of International Military Apostolate (AMI), calls you to keep going ahead, with happiness, in building of a more human and pacific society. Our Lord Jesus Christ encouraged, and commanded, us in the Sermon of the Mount to construct Peace, as He said: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" (Mt 5,9).

8. Dear brethren: When you start your journeys back home, remember that the peace we struggle for, starts at oneself. Saint Ambrose wrote: "Start for having peace in yourself and then you will be able to give peace to others" (Catena Aurea, vol. I., p. 254). Therefore, we will be agents of peace only when we have found God in Christ. Saint Theresa of Jesus, whose fifth centennial we celebrate, said: "Jesus is our guide, and the prize of this war. Do not sleep more, do not sleep, because there is no peace on Earth " (Poetry no. 29).

May God bless you and guide you safely home.

✠ **Juan del Río Martín**
Military Archbishop of Spain

Santiago de Compostela (Spain), September 10, 2015