

**Cardinal Christoph Schönborn**

**Homily in Saint Peter's Basilica**

**Sunday April 6, 2008**

**Ac 2, 14.22-33**

**1 P 1,17-21**

**Lk 24, 13-35**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

«*Misericordias in aeternum cantabo*», «I want to sing your mercy forever Lord, I want to praise you eternally». It is by these words from the psalm (Ps 89,2) that we began these days full of grace. It is granted to us to conclude by the celebration of the Eucharist on the tomb of the apostle Peter.

Today most of us will return to our countries and to our towns. I hope that we will return home like the Emmaus apostles: «Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?».

May our hearts burn with the love that Christ has given us so marvellously during these days. We also should bear witness to our faith with the frankness of Peter (first reading) who, the day of Pentecost, before men from all nations, testified that Jesus was risen. Let all of us be «witnesses of mercy», following the appeal that God's servant, John-Paul II, made to all the faithful, from Lagiewniki.

It is the appeal that we take with us from these days: be witnesses in our daily lives of the Divine Mercy. We can only be witnesses if we have experienced (had the experience) ourselves this mercy. These days should confirm us and give us strength. This force does not come from ourselves but from the Lord. It is His Mercy that we must understand for testifying.

It is a marvellous coincidence to be able to again hear the Easter Gospel of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. On this road the disciples were able, both of them, to experience the Mercy of the Lord and could thereby turn back as witnesses. Who were these two men who were coming back so sadly from Jerusalem? One was called Cleopas. Following an ancient tradition he was the brother of St Joseph, therefore the brother-in-law of Mary, the «uncle» of Jesus. This tradition also says that the other disciple was one of Simon's sons, a cousin of Jesus, who later became Bishop of Jerusalem, after James, the «brother of Jesus». However this may be, even if they were really relations of Jesus «blood relations», their expectations from Jesus (their parent) were far too «carnal», too down to earth!

They saw Jesus and his destiny with eyes that were too mundane, with the desires and the ideas too worldly.

Effectively, their total disappointment concerning the death of the Master came from

their lack of understanding. They hadn't yet the same « sentiments of Christ » (cf. Ph 2,5). All their thoughts were still « ill-formed », they hadn't as yet received the imprint of Christ. They still thought that their Master Jesus would have brought an « earthly », political freedom: « Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened » (Lk 24,21).

Like all the sons of Zebedee, they probably wanted to be « well placed » in the Kingdom of Jesus, they wanted a visible freedom of Israel from the slavery produced by the foreign domination of the Romans.

How we can understand this deceit. We also, we often want a victorious christianity, a tangible success, an earthly domination of christianity. We hope in this way something good and wonderful: that christianity decides politics, economy, the « public place » of the medias. We believe that this will be a blessing for our countries. On the other hand, very often, things go otherwise. It is the thirst for power, corruption, interests that dominate in many countries. The poor suffer, injustice prevails, social justice undergoes serious violation. And God sees all that? His justice is helpless? Why all this suffering? Where is the strength of his arm which extracts from the mire those who are in misery? (cf Lk 51-54).

Even today many people are disappointed. They quit Jerusalem, they leave Christ and his community, his Church. They seek another house, different to the communion with Jesus. They manage to see Jesus as a simple prophet, of course a prophet « by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people » (Lk 24,19), but a simple prophet and not the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. For many today it is thus: Jesus is seen only as a prophet, an exceptional man, and not God become man.

How difficult it is to believe! The patient reproach touches us as well. How much time do we need in order to understand that the « Messiah » must « suffer and so enter into his glory? » (Lk 24,26). Yes, it remains difficult to say « yes » to His suffering and to our suffering.

That remains difficult to accept **this** way is that of God's wisdom, to accept that His mercy be given us by the cross.

Then came the marvellous moment when Jesus revealed the meaning of the Scriptures to the two sad disciples. Passage after passage, he explained to them how in the Torah, Moise and the prophets spoke about him, how they had traced the way. Little by little the Writings are revealed to their hearts and spirit and they begin to speak clearly about Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters! This first « hour of bible reading » is for us a model and an indication of the way. The Mercy of Jesus with these two disappointed disciples is manifested above all by the way he nourishes them with the Word of God. It is for this reason that the love of the Holy Scriptures, of the Word of God is the way where firstly, we encounter the Mercy of Jesus. « Ignorance of the Scriptures, effectively, is

ignorance of Christ », « Ignorance of the Scriptures, is ignorance of Christ » affirmed St Jerome (CCC 133). What a delight for us when Jesus shines for us in the Gospels!

This joyfulness becomes really evident in the following stage: Jesus seems to want to carry on his way, like a stranger, unrecognised, who has been accompanying the two disciples. It is their hospitality that holds him back: they invite him to stay. What an example for us, for preparing ourselves for encountering Christ through hospitality. It isn't for nothing that hospitality figures in the works of corporal mercy. «Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate» (Lk 6,36). It is because they had practiced hospitality that the two disciples were able to encounter the Lord. How many times, in living and doing simple merciful works, were we able to experience the Lord's presence!

The history of the 'successes' of christianity is not a history of military or political 'triumphs', but the 'triumph' of actual experiences. This alone is convincing. Words may be wonderful but they are, nevertheless, only words. The works of mercy are, on the contrary, undeniable. And it is in this way that one day we will be judged (cf Mt 25).

But what really opened the eyes of the disciples was something different. The « exegesis » by Jesus prepared their hearts all along the road. The hospitality that they showed towards a stranger had opened their hearts. But it is during the meal that something happened that transformed their hearts: when the stranger took the bread, pronounced the blessing, broke it and gave it to them, it is then that their eyes were opened.

In the partaking of bread, **He gives himself**. His life offered for them, was contained in this gesture: It is **He Himself** that they receive.

**It is the key** to understanding that was lacking in them. His work was not a political victory, nor a military force, but the offering of his own life.

**Jesus gives himself** to them in the breaking of the bread. They really receive **He Himself**. From then on he will be with them, every day, He Himself, in the gift of his own life, in the Eucharist.

In spite of all the disappointments, in spite of all their unfaithfulness and their lack of understanding, he manifested himself and gave himself to them. His Mercy has touched, opened, and transformed their hearts. From then on they can be witnesses of his Mercy. They can start out on the road with ardent hearts and bring to others the testimony of the Risen Lord.

In this Eucharist the Lord addresses himself once more to us. After these blessed days of the congress, get under way, we also, with ardent hearts, to be everywhere, there where the Lord sends us, witnesses of his infinite Mercy.

## Summary

Mercy: that is for the Cardinal Schönborn the mission of those participating in the first World and Apostolic Congress on Divine Mercy which was held in Rome, from 2 to 6 April.

The Cardinal Schönborn concluded the congress during the celebration of the Eucharist in Saint Peter's Basilica on Sunday morning.

The success of Christianity, said the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna in his homily, cannot be measured by its political, economical influence or by the news. The authentic « key to the understanding » of Christianity is found in the gift that Christ himself gave to the Church and that the Christians are called on to perpetuate, by diffusing the love of a Merciful God to the world.

Commentating on the passage in the Gospels of the two disciples of Emmaus, the Cardinal observed that « we also often desire a victorious christianity, a tangible success, an earthly power by christianity. And at the same time we hope for something good and wonderful: that the christian faith governs politics, economy and the 'public place' of the medias. We consider that this would be a blessing for our countries. But things are so often different. What governs many countries is the thirst for power, corruption, economical interests ».

Like the pilgrims of Emmaus, many today are « disappointed » ... But they are capable of « restraining Jesus » and welcoming him: hospitality is one of the works of mercy.

« The history of the 'success' of christianity is not a history of military or political triumphs, but 'the triumph' of true to life mercy. It only is convincing. Words may be wonderful but they are, justly, only words. Acts of mercy on the other hand are undeniable. And it is by this that one day we shall be judged ».

And then the disciples recognise Christ by the breaking of bread. They do not receive simple bread, but they receive Jesus himself. It is the « key to understanding » that they were lacking: his work was not a political victory, nor a military power, but the offering of his own life.

« That is the mandate that we take with us after these days: be witnesses, in our daily lives, of the divine mercy. We can be witnesses of the divine mercy in our daily lives. We can be witnesses of mercy only if we ourselves experience mercy. These days should reinforce us in that and give us the strength. But such a strength does not come from us but from the Lord. It is His Mercy that we should know in order to testify ».

*Anita S. Bourdin*