

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort  
(so auf Englisch vorgetragen)!

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Text: Mt 8,5–13

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Dear soldiers,

I.

The Sermon on the Mount belongs to the great texts of the New Testament. The Sermon on the Mount answers the beatitudes as formulated by Mathew (Mt 5,3–12) with a program for living which ethics are coined by faith and an abundance of love. Jesus himself is testimony for that. Those who live like that are able to understand that peace is a product of justice as expressed by the prophet Isaiah (Jes 32,17). A perfect summary is given in the last verses of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock’ (Mt 7,24–25). Those who listened to Jesus would understand immediately that this is no ordinary scribe talking but ‘someone with authority’ (Mt 7,28).

II.

With this understanding we can get the deeper meaning of what we have just heard. The story of the army officer of Capernaum and his servant show what it means to trust God’s justice and mercy. It means to experience the authority of Jesus and to live out of this experience. The army

officer connects his faith to his everyday life in which he is obliged in his military obedience. 'Lord, I'm not good enough for you to come into my house. Just give the order, and my servant will get well. I have officers who give orders to me, and I have soldiers who take orders from me. I can say to one of them, 'Go!' and he goes. I can say to another, 'Come!' and he comes. I can say to my servant, 'Do this!' and he will do it' (Mt 8,7–9).

Brothers and sisters, this type of obedience is no blind obedience. It is a powerful obedience of faith with strong roots in humane sincerity following a clear formation of conscience. There is more trust in God's powers than in one's own powers. Here we have a kind of an army officer that speaks out of a security of conscience and out of life experience. He feels that there is meaning to his job and he takes responsibility. What is that supposed to mean?

If responsibility is understood as obedience to God, which also means dedication to human rights, it is true responsibility. That kind of true responsibility leads to true humanity. Herein lie great responsibilities for the faith to shine and to inspire others. It is about the untouchable dignity of every single human coming from God being the basis for law and justice. Such an attitude is of great importance in today's world. Letting yourself being guided by an impregnable trust in God and a formed conscience means letting your own actions stand on a strong and secure foundation.

### III.

This is where military chaplaincy has an important role to play. It can provide ethical reasoning and solid foundations to accompany military actions, which have a specific aim. Strategies for peace have to do with attitude. Strategies for peace also have to do with cultural and social sensibility. Strategies for peace always need to consider all options to understand conflicts, to prevent escalation, and to promote reconciliation and participation. A culture of weighing all the options can promote sensibility to recognize ambivalences of power, of violence and victor's mentality and to establish instead a true and sustainable competence for peace. Additionally, there is the personal responsibility to resist ideological "build-up". That requires to be critical towards one's own thought process and education but also to be critical towards political processes of our time. What are the consequences of that?

#### IV.

The army officer of the gospel shows a unity of faith, knowledge and actions. This is exactly where the great challenges of our time can be found. We are challenged to overcome the discrepancies of faith, knowledge and our actions. We have to find a more distinguished way of judging. In other words: We have to forge knowledge and conscience to be able to act morally in challenging situations and to be able to secure human dignity and to create peace as a product of justice. This is the only way to prevent getting used to violence and acts of war as a means to secure peace. Violence and acts of war will almost always make suffering and injustice permanent instead of counteracting them. This insight does not exclude the possibility that there are indeed situations in which use of violence can be justified. These are situations in which it is impossible to create peace without means of violence and in which acts of violence are means to eventually create peace. As a general rule, however, is violence only to be accepted as last resort. Violence is to be reduce to the absolute minimum. Such violence will stay an inevitable evil that regrettably cannot be prevented. At first, all measures for a peaceful resolution have to be exhausted. The proportionality of violence including all consequences has to be observed. The ultimate goal of these violent acts hast to peace and a sustainable and lasting order of peace.

#### V.

Finally, I want to remind all of you also in the name of military chaplaincy that prayer and praying in community is a very effective measure for peace. When words and actions fail it is time for praying! A prayer is concrete and Christian action for peace. In its diversity, praying is to be understood as one of the “Christian weapons” with which Christian fight for peace. Where there would be powerlessness, a prayer is a sign of sincere sympathy and true solidarity with everybody. A prayer can be an expression for the desire for lasting peace. If practiced with authenticity it can unite, it can tear down walls and it can be the starting point for dialogue between human beings. A prayer can help in processing experiences and suffering. In the wake of suffering and misery that we cannot understand, a prayer can help to find stability in what we as Christians understand as the reality: God who *is* peace. Therefore, a prayer is not just a sign of good will and solidarity. A prayer is an important step for further action. A prayer is like a preliminary draft for action! Therefore, it applies to everybody in a position of responsibility: praying has to lead to action.

VI.

We can see that in the army officer of today's gospel. His trust in Jesus and, thus, his trust in God's doing is his prayer. This prayer turns to action. His customary military obedience has led to an obedience towards God. That is what we stand for in military chaplaincy. We stand for the sources of responsibility that absolutely want ethical containment of violence because we are concerned about human dignity and conflict resolution with as little violence as possible.

The army officer of Capernaum is our example. Jesus himself makes him an example for us when he praises his trust in front of the disciples. Prayer turns into action. On this foundation, every human being can master the challenges of life. Military chaplaincy offers all the help men need. Amen.