

Continental Assembly 20.-22.05.2016 – Topic refugees

Due to our Christian faith, the biblical heritage, the ideas of Adolph Kolping and due to the role model of Pope Francis, this is an appeal for the unity of Europe and an appeal of hope, for bridges and peace – a break-in.

Dear sisters and brothers,

„Es gibt zu viele Flüchtlinge, sagen die Menschen. Es gibt zu wenige Menschen, sagen die Flüchtlinge.“ (Ernst Ferstl) (Meaning: Humans say that there are too many refugees. Refugees say there are not enough humans.)

It is quite obvious to start here in Vienna with theological words and thoughts about the topic of refugee with a quote from Prof. Paul Michael Zulehners book „entängstigt euch“ (meaning: to lose the fear). The quote says: „Wir brauchen jetzt vernünftige Mutmacher, Hoffnungsspenden, Realisten, die sehen, dass jede Krise eine große Chance in sich birgt.“ Jede und jeder von uns kann einen wertvollen Beitrag leisten. Das wird uns umso eher gelingen, wenn diffuse Angst in rationales Besorgnis gewandelt wird. Begründete Sorge kann kraftvolle Energie für eine zukunftsfähige Politik und einen nachhaltigen Einsatz freisetzen. Die Formel lautet: „Wird (diffuse) Angst kleiner, kann (liebende) Solidarität größer werden.“ (Meaning: Today we need people who can encourage others. Realists, who understand that every crisis brings a lot of chances. Each and every one of us can make a valuable contribution. This is more likely to

happen, if diffuse fears are transformed into rational concerns. Rational concerns can spread energy for a more sustainable political and commitment. The formula should be: If (diffuse) anxiety is getting less, than (loved) solidarity can grow). But then the great imposition of our time is: „Entängstigt euch!“ (Meaning: to lose the fear)

These „entängstigt euch“(meaning: to lose the fear) should be followed by theological words, that are based on the words of Adolph Kolping: „Wo das Christentum ist, soll sich`s am Unglücklichen zuerst erweisen. Die Jugend ist nicht christlich, die nicht barmherzig zu sein weiss.“ (Meaning: Where Christianity can be found, it should be turned towards the unhappy ones first. No unmerciful virtue can be of Christian origin.)

Desperation and confidence can be recognized in the refugees that come to us. Desperation about the terrible experiences from their homelands and confidence about the start of a new life. What is our point? Do we allow the various distress and miseries to approach us? Are the words of Adolph Kolping our guidelines for our toughest and action? „Wo das Christentum ist, soll sich`s am Unglücklichen zuerst erweisen. Die Tugend ist nicht christlich, die nicht barmherzig zu sein weiß.“ (Meaning: Where Christianity can be found, it should be turned towards the unhappy ones first. No unmerciful virtue can be of Christian origin.) The unfortunate, that Adolph Kolping is referring too,

is always a single person, with his or her own history. Age, gender, religion and skin-color do not matter; what matters is the human being itself. Do we remain concerned by the diverse afflictions, dedicated in our help or do we blunt slowly?

In his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade the author Navid Kermani said: „Anyone who has forgotten why there needs to be a Europe should look at the emaciated, exhausted, frightened faces of the refugees who have left everything behind, given up everything, risked their lives for the promise that Europe still represents. And yet I too cannot help thinking it when I experience the lack of interest of our public sphere in the seemingly apocalyptic disaster in the East, which we try to repel with barbed-wire fences, warships, stereotypes and mental blinkers. Just a three-hour flight away from Frankfurt, whole ethnic groups are being exterminated or expelled, girls are being enslaved, many of humanity's most important cultural monuments are being blown up...”

Yes, we are demanded – continuously. It is about the hope of the people, about women, men and children, it is about charity and human dignity and therefore it is about the center of our Christian beliefs. Adolph Kolping said: „Wahre Humanität, wenn sie nämlich christlich ist, hat einen wahrhaft christlichen Grund und ein wahrhaft christliches Ziel und erweist sich dadurch allein auch als wahrhaft menschlich.“ (Meaning: True humanity is the Christian humanity, with its goals and reasons. Thereby it is a humanely humanity.)

Our words, actions and reactions are crucial points when we experience in our communities, that hate is preached and people call for violence, instead of calling for solidarity and community. Adolph Kolping encouraged the people, to improve themselves and thereby the situation they were in. This challenges us in the questions of our time and in the combustion points of our lives. His words remain our guideline: „Wo das Christentum ist, soll sich`s am Unglücklichen zuerst erweisen. Die Tugend ist nicht christlich, die nicht barmherzig zu sein weiß.“ Meaning: Where Christianity can be found, it should be turned towards the unhappy ones first. No unmerciful virtue can be of Christian origin.) Christian believes and values remain the basis for our actions. They are the opposite of hate and agitation. The love of god for all humans it is the core point of Christianity. To life by this – therein Adolph Kolping is a role model for us.

So fare, my first considerations in these rather spiritual words.

With my following words I would like to focus more on the topics of refugees in Europe.

It is very important that we discuss the topic of refugees at our Continental Assembly. Truly this topic is one of the most controversial discussed topics within Europe and brings a lot of challenges and opportunities at the same time. Therefore I believe it is very important that we as Kolping have a common understanding and common goals.

In general the topic of refugees is not new. Since the biblical days the world experienced refugee movements. But what is new to us here in Europe, is that more refugees are trying to find a new life in Europe. If we look into numbers, we see clearly that most refugees still remain in the crisis-ridden regions of the Middle East or Africa and flee into their own neighbour countries. But still we clearly see and feel that Europe is changing as well and more people come to Europe. The current refugee movements impose new challenges on Europe which can only be overcome by adopting a common ethical orientation. In this point the churches and we as Kolping can play an important role. As Pope Francis points out in the Bull of indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*: "At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective."

Pope Francis repeatedly points out, that refugee movements are a structural reality of our time and the priority must be to provide programmes which address the causes of migration and the changes it entails in the different countries. Therefore we need unity.

As Christians we can be a role model for our societies addressing this causes and changes; as a particular testimony to our Christian identity

is given when each individual who seeks protection and refuge in our country is treated with dignity and hospitality. The words from the Gospel according to Matthew "For I was [...] a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt25:35) directly point out, that each one of us and can bring the right light into the refugee movements. It clearly shows that xenophobia and racism are incompatible with the Christian perception of humanity.

The Church's commitment to refugees particularly concentrates on human encounter, personal assistance and humanitarian action. But also in being a role model for other people, as many volunteers are active in the (Catholic) Church. Of course we are aware, that the church and we as Kolping can only be one of the actors in the current refugee situation and we cannot offer a substitute for viable structures of the state and civil society. But we can and we should play our role in it and do our best to help the refugees in need. As Kolping already said: "Who shows courage, encourages others."

This can be done by directly taking action and making strong commitments. As Pope Francis reminds us in his message for the World day of Migrants and Refugees, that "Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognized in migrants and refugees, in displaced persons and in exiles", we should always keep in mind that all our efforts must always conserve the individual dignity of each refugee—regardless of their origin, social standing, religion or gender; in front of good everybody is equal. We as Christians should always look into the individual biographies and take refugees as persons and not as

numbers. During his speech in Lesbos Pope Francis pointed out, that refugees are not number, but first and foremost human beings.

Already in 2014 he pointed out that: "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more." (Message of his holiness for the world day of migrants).

But he is not only speaking about the topic of refugees, further he is putting his words into action. During his visit to the island of Lesbos this year he took 12 Syrians from three families – all of them Muslims – with him to the Vatican. "All twelve of them are children of God," he said on the flight back to Rome.

Sometimes we downplay our own actions and want to weaken the importance, by saying: "this is just a drop on a hot stone." The pope has a totally different view: "Diese Geste war ein Tropfen in den Ozean, ein Ozean der hoffentlich nie mehr derselbe sein wird".

(Meaning: This gesture was a drop on the ocean, an ocean that should hopefully never be the same). Referring to the point, that all changes happen due to small signs, no sign is unavailing or too weak. As Adolph Kolping said: „Was man im Großen nicht schafft, soll man im Kleinen nicht unversucht lassen.“ (Meaning: What can't be done successfully on a grand scale, shouldn't stay untried on a small scale).

But what is the next step? Currently we experience that the numbers of refugees are not that high like last year, but conditions at the borders are getting tougher every day and at the same time we all have people in our countries that are willing to start a new life in their new homes. As written in Leviticus: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." (Lev.19:33-34) I wonder about the fact, that those people, for whom the statements of the Bible and its responsible exegesis are important, at least in other areas, blending such crucial statement out when it comes to the topic of refugees.

Integration is the next big challenge on our agendas. The integration of people with a different cultural or religious background of course poses challenges to our societies. But we shouldn't make the same mistakes that have been done years ago with past refugees and migrants (compartmentalization and parallel cultures). If we stand together and take our responsibility for ensuring the success of social integration processes, we can make it happen. I guess we all agree, that there is the need to enable the refugees to learn our languages, to gain access to education, to acquire the qualifications which they need for the labour market and to take up an occupation. But at the same time integration is a more-dimensional process, as it is a reciprocal process for immigrants and the host societies.

Pope Francis reminds us what the task for all Christians is in today's situation: Giving "concrete hope" to people who have lost their

homes. This can be done by guidance, pastoral care, housing, healthcare and psycho-social assistance but also via skill-building and strengthening volunteer commitment in the Church's aid to refugees. These are all actions that already take place on different levels within Kolping. I call upon this Continental Assembly to enable all our members to help the ones in need and to remind ourselves of the Christian values and also the background of Kolping. Coming from the craft-tradition we can use our abilities to enable refugees with a social participation through work and education. For example with training posts and vocational prospects, help in kindergartens, schools, further education and adult education institutions.

In 2015 the pope called up on every Catholic diocese in Europe to take in a refugee family, an appeal that fell on deaf ears in most dioceses. But this European appeal is exactly what we need. The topic of refugees is a European topic. No country can tackle the issue alone. We as Kolping Europe should stand together in a strong unity to work towards the integration of refugees on different levels. And this is what we should also expect from our political European leaders, to stand together as a unity. As pope Francis pointed out in his message for the 2015 World Day of Migrants and Refugees: "It is necessary to respond to the globalization of migration with the globalization of charity and cooperation, in such a way as to make the conditions for migrants more humane."

Of course the guideline for a common European refugee work has to be implemented on a political scale. No European country should be

left alone with the challenges of incoming refugees. Polemics, populisms and nationalism is contra-productive. Although simplifications, banalization reaches people, but often lead to uncertainty, promote the questioning of an equal human dignity and lead to new ditches. Therefore I would again like to point out, that we should all work together, find common goals and solutions for the refugees that are here and those who will come and on a long scale also against human trafficking and refugee-causes. With our solidarity and our actions we can be guidance for the politics, we can bring new ideas to the political culture.

I want to close my speech with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) which I believe is known by you. In short in the story, a man has been beaten and robbed by bandits while walking down a street. A number of people pass him and didn't offer any help, including a priest and a Levite. But the next person walking down that road is a Samaritan (a stranger) sees the man, bandages his wounds, takes him to the inn, gives the innkeeper money out of his own pocket and asks him to look after the man. The Good Samaritan parable is one of the many stories of the bible that is particularly timely for today's refugee's topic. This should serve as a prime example of why Christians have an obligation to help all those in need.

„Only those who serve with love build peace.“ Pope Francis in his speach at Lesbos)

What is already said at Ernst Ferstl: „Es gibt zu viele Flüchtlinge, sagen die Menschen. Es gibt zu wenige Menschen, sagen die Flüchtlinge.“
(Meaning: Humans say that there are too many refugees. Refugees say there are not enough humans.)