

## **Sermon at the Continental Convention from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 in Vienna**

### **Praeses of Kolping Europe, Priest Josef Holtkotte**

Blessed Adolph Kolping was a man "of faith and of deed". He was the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world", just like Jesus instructed his disciples to be. German Federal President Joachim Gauck said in his speech on the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Adolph Kolping in the year 2013 in Cologne: "We don't only have the awful, disgusting figures of our history, but also the great men and women", and Blessed Adolph Kolping is one of them.

The Kolping sisters and brothers shall be – just like him – women and men, Christians "of faith and of deed", "salt of the earth" and "light of the world". As with Adolph Kolping, also today this must not be just theory without practice, words without life.

Pope Francis admonishes in his Apostolic Letter „Evangelii Gaudium“, which received so much positive response: "In the faithfulness to the gift of the Lord the church also knows how to bear fruit."

These fruits have to be brought in the very concrete situation of the contemporary life and of our time! In the course of the Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis speaks about topics which were very important to Blessed Adolph Kolping and which are of great significance, for example: Same opportunities for all children and adolescents, independent of their social background, so that they can develop well, find a profession and their place in society and that all can live from their work, that for good work they will receive fair wages, which guarantee the livelihood.

Adolph Kolping demanded fruits for the families which are the primordial cells and cells of growth of every society and the church. If these cells are sick, unstable or do not exist at all, the most important vital element and elixir of life of every society and the church is not or not sufficiently existent, then the society is underdeveloped and suffers. To bear fruits means to Adolph Kolping and to us today, as his sisters and brothers, to contribute to the society, so that it is fair and peaceful and committed to the common good in the Christian sense.

For this purpose, personal faith is essential because our life without personal faith gets empty and unstable, because without personal faith, values are debatable and cannot be really fixed, because without personal faith, the persons are at the mercy of humans. If the human being gets the last instance – the merciful God may prevent us from this!

God has to remain our last instance!

Therefore, personal faith is so essential, and not just an invention of the church so that the church services will be properly filled up. Personal faith leads to responsibility, to the respect of the other's dignity. For we shall love God – and our neighbors! And not kill, discriminate, despise, scare others. Mercifulness is the up-to-date program of life!

These are the fruits Pope Francis is having in mind and Adolph Kolping reminds us; all persons who confess to him as Kolping sons and daughters have to offer these fruits in and demand them today. In doing so, our hands can and must be getting dirty.

Pope Francis writes: „I like a “dented” church more that is bruised and stained because it went out to the streets, than a church that is sick because of its reticence and its laziness,

clinging to the own securities. I don't want a church that is worried about being the center of attention and finally is entangled in an accumulation of fixed ideas and disputes. If anything is to bring us into sacred worries and bother our conscience, then it should be the fact that so many of our sisters and brothers live without the strength, the light and the consolation of the friendship with Jesus Christ, without a faith community that affiliates them, without a horizon of meaning and life."

Dear sisters and brothers,

what was for Adolph Kolping, and what has to be for us today, the fundamental reason for our commitment regarding the realization of our faith, of the gospel of Jesus Christ to shape the world? Adolph Kolping was deeply carried by a "twofold faith": in the humans and in God! For him, those two faith contents belong together.

In his sermons, Adolph Kolping regrets that too many people have too little faith in the human being. Who doesn't believe in the human being, doesn't give him credit and who doesn't give him credit, doesn't encourage him neither, doesn't

advocate for him, declares him – too soon and unduly – a “hopeless case”.

Who believes in the human being, provides especially young persons with opportunities, helps them to show what they are made of, knows that humans also choose the wrong track, but doesn't give up because he/she believes in the human being, who is created in the image and likeness of God, who possesses talents and abilities and who, corresponding to God's plan, should accomplish a task in this world and that is intended to last forever.

Where the world and the people get spiritless, the world and the people become merciless. Many death signs in the world warn us of this: the hate, the violence. The persecution – but also the envy, the corruption, the dishonesty, the manipulation. Those are merciless death signs, too.

You also note the spiritlessness of some boastful noisy troublemaker or anonymous agitator or populist – not only in the social media.

When the man acts as a wolf to other men, that is being merciless and without spirit, he also will become an arsonist

and preacher of hate. Let us fill up our life with faith, with hope and love – so that it won't get spiritless and merciless.

Dear sisters and brothers, we are in the middle of the year of mercifulness. We get encouraged to take the faith seriously. The mercifulness of God wants to reach our real life.

This faith in mankind is connected with the faith in God, which enables the proper faith in mankind. That's why Kolping says: "Life rests on faith." And at another moment: "Without a strong, lively Christianity, man is nothing and won't be nothing neither." To hold on to, live and spread the faith in the mankind and the faith in God, is the fundament of the Kolping families, the Kolping Society, the fulfillment of Adolph Kolping's mission in our time. We look at Adolph Kolping and notice that his and our work promote the faith in the mankind and the faith in God.

There exist important impulses, important commitment and countless initiatives. Even today, Adolph Kolping's message is up to date. We, too, contribute to it with our reflections, exchange and through our togetherness. We want to continue his work. Therefore it is especially important to bring people into the Kolping families and to impart the

Blessed Adolph Kolping's spirit to them. How can this succeed? We need courage for the task that we discover. We need the firm conviction that every individual has his/her dignity, that God is alive in our world, that we give the world a human face through our activities. In doing so, together we are on our way in the large Kolping community. Adolph Kolping is our companion on the way. Thank God. Amen.