

John X Patriarch of Antioch & all the East - Homily in the Opening Prayer of the WCC 11th General Assembly



Homily in the Opening Prayer of the WCC 11th General Assembly – Karlsruhe-Germany- 31 August 2022.

Dear brothers and sisters,
Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ.
Peace and love to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I come to you carrying greetings and peace from the Phoenician shores that heard the proclamation of the Gospel by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and afterward by the Apostles. I come to you from Damascus, the city in which Saint Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, received illumination and the place of his repentance. I

come from the Apostolic City of Antioch, which preached to all nations the Gospel of reconciliation and salvation, and where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Since the Apostolic period, Antioch has persisted in defending the freedom of the children of God to worship Him in spirit and truth and supporting the Church in the Gentile cities against discrimination and exclusion. This led to the fact that the love of God, which He demonstrated to us through the death and resurrection of the Savior, is now proclaimed in all parts of the world. Thus, there is no doubt that Christ's prophets and teachers in Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (Acts 13:1), have contributed to make this gathering here today a reality for all of us, coming from all the tribes of the earth; from various countries, nationalities, and races, to praise Christ our God, Who granted us reconciliation with the Father and the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). We are gathered here today to recall and chant with joy: "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." God is love, and His love moves us, directs us, and teaches us to imitate His love, as the only New Testament commandment that includes and deeply fulfills all other commandments (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14), because it addresses the new person by the spirit, not by the letter.

There is a consensus among the apostles, the writers of the New Testament, that the love of God for us was supremely expressed in the death of Christ for our sake. Along the same lines, we can affirm that the entire economy of salvation: the incarnation of God the Word, His life on earth as a human being, His teachings, and His conversations with people to spread the gospel of the kingdom, all of which demonstrate the love of God and compassion for human beings.

In the Gospel according to John, we find examples of Christ's encounters with different people, including Nathanael the Apostle, the prominent Pharisee teacher Nicodemus, the paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda, a royal official, an adulterous woman, a blind man, and many other examples. Nonetheless, God's love and compassion for humanity, for the sake of salvation, is in common in all these encounters. In these the love of Christ that heals from sin appears, followed by the person's response to this love as befits. The Lord Jesus affirmed to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Immediately, after this statement, He went into detail about the severity of the judgment on those who prefer darkness to light, especially after the light has come into the world (John 3:19). Whoever loves the light and comes to it has repented of his sinful deeds and loved the truth (John 3:20-21), lived according to it, and walked in the light as Christ did (see 1 John 2:6).

Among the encounters recorded by John the Evangelist, a meeting with a

Samaritan woman is characterized by the Evangelist's elaborate details of this encounter and its redemptive implications. At its onset, the narrative emphasizes that our Lord and God Jesus Christ "had to pass through Samaria" when He was travelling from Judea to Galilee. However, biblical studies inform us that the reason that necessitated this passage in Samaria was neither the geography of the land, nor its network of routes. The Jews preferred other routes for their journey from Judea to Galilee. However, the compelling reason here was God's love for the Samaritans as well as His desire to visit their city to meet with the Samaritan woman, so that she, along with all the people of Samaria, would believe in "the Savior of the world" and God's love would again lead to repentance and the salvation of many.

God the Word was tired and thirsty after walking to the city of the Samaritans, for He had chosen to become a human being like us. As a person, He experienced the fatigue of sacrificial love for the sake of others, especially the weak. He then sat at Jacob's Well and addressed a Samaritan woman, thus crossing all social boundaries to enlighten a sinful woman and lead her to repentance.

The first barrier that Jesus overcame was the socio-ethnic barrier of centuries of division and religious hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus intended to pass through Samaria, but He also sent His disciples to buy food there. Moreover, He asked the Samaritan woman for water to drink, disregarding one of the famous first-century teachings that compared the food of the Samaritans to the flesh of swine. These are details that the Evangelist John deliberately underlines in order to make the reader understand the behavior of the Lord Jesus, which is far from discrimination and exclusion, and which does not place any racial or socio-ethnic barrier in the way of salvation.

The Lord Jesus also crossed another barrier, namely the bad reputation that was accorded to the Samaritan woman; perhaps due to her inappropriate behavior, as it was proven later that she had married five men and was now living with a sixth man to whom she was not married. Her status prompted her to walk to the well in midday heat of the sun to avoid encountering other women, for she was not welcome among them. Nonetheless, her social standing did not prevent Christ from paying attention to her, because He is the doctor who came to heal the sick, not the healthy, and to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous (Matthew 9:12-13).

The Lord also crossed the gender barrier. If a man were to address a woman alone at a well, it would have seemed like a challenge to many. Therefore, the Evangelist pointed out explicitly the absence of the disciples (verse 4:8) and their amazement when they returned and saw Christ talking to a woman (verse 4:27). The Jewish sages advised men not to engage in unnecessary conversations with women. They included addressing women among the actions that prevented a man from

becoming wise and from being trained in studying the Scripture under a wise teacher's instruction.

All these barriers failed to prevent the Lord Jesus from preaching both to the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans about the living water that springs, neither from Jerusalem nor from Sychar, but the water that the Messiah Jesus alone gives to all who believe in Him.

At first, the woman found it absurd that a Jewish man was addressing her, and she mocked Him when she heard Him mentioning the living water that He was offering, while not carrying any bucket to draw water. Nonetheless, she soon applauded His words about the water that will never make her thirst, as this would save her from the trouble of hard work. Our Lord and God did not despise her limited understanding of His heavenly mysteries, nor her approach to divine gifts from an egotistic and narrow perspective, but as a patient doctor He continued the conversation, and gradually revealed Himself to her. Then she realized the Lord's absolute knowledge of all things. When she heard Him tell her everything she had done, she knew that she was in front of someone who had the power to do what He had promised (see Rom 4:21). Then afterward, she also realized that He transcends all racial, national, and socio-ethnic divisions and that He neither differentiates between a Jew, a Samaritan, and a Greek; nor between a man and a woman, rich and poor, people of the north and people of the south, nor between people with different skin colors. Jesus Christ wants to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation with God to all so that all entrust him their lives, and thus all may be saved. He came for the people to learn how to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, so that they could worship the Father not by outward appearances and animal sacrifices, but by spiritual worship and repentance. They will then offer their bodies and selves as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" as a "spiritual worship", according to the words of the apostle Paul (Romans 12:1). These are the true worshipers who worship the Father by doing all that is true and in the light (see John 3:21).

The conversation of the Samaritan woman with the Lord Jesus is an encounter of spiritual healing that cured her from the love of darkness, passion, and the mind governed by the flesh, which is hostile to God (see Rom 8:7). Through the grace of Christ, she acquired reconciliation with God, her life changed, and her priorities were reset, hence becoming a preacher of Christ for her people.

The conversation with the Samaritan woman reveals the Christ's intention to heal sinners and to reconcile all in Him into one Body. We learn from the Samaritan woman that sitting in the presence of Christ transforms us and raises us from earthly thoughts and works of the flesh that deprive us of fellowship with God and His kingdom (Galatians 5:19-21), to "the mind of the spirit" and reconciliation by the blood of Christ. The encounter with Christ teaches us love that "is patient...and

not self-seeking”, “does no harm” to anyone, and fulfills the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). The Samaritan woman also calls us to believe in Christ without hypocrisy, to obtain the living water from which whoever drinks will never thirst. Whoever believes in the Son comes to Him, for He is full of grace and truth, and from His fullness, we receive these good things. He had witnessed and taught what is true so that we could learn from Him to avoid self-love and love our fellow humans even unto death. Christ’s love for us and our love for Christ, is shown by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:2-3), becoming the foundation of a new life in reconciliation with God and in unity with all those who love His name.

Today, a divine necessity urges me to ask you to choose to pass through the suffering Middle East, as Christ chose to pass through Samaria. Pass and look at Christ’s beloved ones there, as He looked at the Samaritans, without disregarding those who differ from you, without excluding the people of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Holy Land, especially because their ancestors served the Gospel of reconciliation and spread it to all nations.

Raise your voice against the exclusion of the people of the Middle East, and against depriving them of food, medicine, heating, and medical treatment, and against sanctions and economic blockade on the pretext of political disagreements. Object to banning Christians and their prayers and hymns, descending from Christ’s eternity, from the land that Christ trod and upon which the apostles worked. Raise your voice and make an appeal for the divulgence of the fate of the Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul, and Youhanna, whose case has gone unnoticed by the international community for more than nine years. Object to the exploitation of the faithful Christians suffering from the sanctions and blockade, taking advantage of their situation to proselytize them and make them abandon their church and follow another. Stand with deeds, and not just with words, and support your brothers and sisters with sacrificial love, regardless of their ancient languages different from yours, for they carry the traditions of an authentic Christian apostolic environment imbued with love, humility, and reverence.

Many statements are written to avoid censure and relieve the conscience from overlooking the marginalization of some people, groups, and regions. Whereas, whenever there is a genuine sympathy and an interest in a situation, actions become serious in application and persist with urgency and an effective methodology. Are the Christians of Antioch underserving of defense against exclusion, discrimination, starvation, oppression, torment and death?

God loves us and with us is God, Emmanuel, forever. He is our peace, joy, life, and resurrection. I pray today with you that our meeting in this WCC 11th General Assembly will be an encounter with Christ Who quenches our thirst for His love; Who provides us with healing, repentance, and salvation; Who saves all people

from the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, as well as every epidemic, famine, and persecution; and Who grants the entire world peace that surpasses all



grant you
men.





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