

Tournay, 15th october 2013,

To all of you who seek for peace,

PEACE!

The situation of the Syrian people invite us all to intensify our prayer for peace and for the end of this war which has been going on for 2 years already, which has caused the death of more than 100 000 people, and made 2 millions of refugees.

Pope Francis asked for a day of prayer for Syria and Middle-East, on the 7th of september, underlining the necessity of a contribution of the christians in the search for a negotiation to solve the conflict. In his message of the Angelus of September the 1st, he recalled that : "The use of violence never leads to peace. War calls to war, violence calls to violence!" On that occasion, the pope made two calls. The first was addressed to all the parties of the conflict and exhorted them to "listen to the voice of their own conscience, not to make decisions based on their own interests, but to look at the other as a brother and to bravely and resolutely take the path of negotiation, going past blind oppositions." The second call was addressed to the international community, asking to "make every effort to promote without delay clear initiatives based on dialogue and negotiation for peace in this Nation, for the good of the Syrian people. Let no effort be spared to guarantee a humanitarian assistance to those who are affected by this terrible conflict, particularly to refugees in this country and many others in neighboring countries. May the possibility to help be granted to humanitarian agents committed in the effort to alleviate the sufferings of the population."

If we succeeded so far in avoiding a military solution, the perspective of a negotiated solution remains weak. At an internal level, the different groups of opposition fight and cannot find a consensus. At an international level, the UN Security Council has approved, on October the 11th, a mission with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which obtained the Peace Nobel Prize of 2013, to supervise the destruction of stockpiles in Syria and its production facilities. And yet, many challenges still remain to establish peace in this country. First of all, to guarantee humanitarian actors the access to affected populations. Secondly, to convoke an international conference in charge of finding a solution to this conflict, asking an immediate cease-to-fire, the respect of human rights and of international policy, a complete embargo over weapons and a control over arms sales, and the commitment of a negotiation process in order to permit a transition to democracy.

So that peace may reign again on this country, which contributed so much to civilization, let us pray :

*"O eternal Father, the lands of Syria have witnessed your salvation : it is here, on the road to Damascus, that you revealed to Paul the resurrected Christ ; it is there also that disciples of your Son have been called 'christians' for the first time ; it is from this country that the first christian generations have spread the word in the name of the Gospel ! We ask you to turn your loving gaze towards this people ! May the actors still in war really dialogue ! May the international community be the guarantee for holding a negotiated solution! May the refugees come home. May the Justice be and the reconciliation be promoted so that this country can be rebuilt and walk in the paths of peace! We ask you in the name of Him who is our Peace, Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord. Amen!"*

Best wishes,

Dom Irenaeus Rezende Guimarães

Benedictan monk from Notre-Dame Abbey, Tournay, France.