

5 October 2019 Evening Prayer Reflection

Stollen Chapel in Langen, Austria

Dear Festive Congregation here at the “Stollen”!

An eventful day lies behind us as now we meet here at the “Stollen” to end this day, to thank for all the good that is happening and has happened here, and for the man who was born not far from here and gave his life back to God, his Creator, 110 years ago in far away South Africa. His life is well known to the insiders here, so I don't want to bore you with it. And if someone has forgotten a detail, please read the special edition of “Ahorn Blättle”! A few thoughts about him and from him to get in the mood for prayer.

Without a certain sentence he said, none of us would be here today:

“If no one goes, I go!”

If no one goes, I go! Did you ever think, say, do that? Yes, it depends on the occasion. If no one goes, I go. If nobody goes, I don't go either. Why should I? Does it really depend on me? Who am I! There are others with more skills, more talents, more abilities ... If nobody leaves the sinking ship, I'm not leaving it either. Or? Am I the first to leave? If no one stands up to injustice, I don't stand up either. If nobody runs to help ... If everyone at the work place mobs a lady, what do I do? If no one is defending this woman, am I? I have the impression that if no country takes climate protection seriously, why should Austria do so? More or less like this is the general impression of today's politics – worldwide. Why us, why me, if others don't do it either!

It often takes a portion of courage to swim against the current, to stand by one's opinion publicly. When the then Soviet President Khrushchev condemned the Stalin era in his famous speech, someone in the Congress Hall is said to have shouted: “Where were you, Comrade Khrushchev, when all these innocent people were slaughtered? Khrushchev paused, looked around the hall and said: “Would the person who said this please stand up?” The tension grew in the hall. Nobody got up. Then Khrushchev said: “Well, that's the answer, whoever you may be. I was in exactly the same situation then as you are now.”

“If no one goes, I go!” Said, done – by Francis (Franz) Pfanner at the age of 55.

Thomas Merton, American Trappist and author, writes about him: “Outwardly he resembled an Old Testament prophet: the eyes that stood in an eagle's face shone like the eyes of a seer. The sensitive lips that moved in a dainty beard of a prophet were capable of evoking a crusade ...”

In him burned the fire of devotion to Jesus Christ, a love that went to the extreme, even to the limits of the world.

Abbot Francis recruited women in the territory of the monarchy. At a home mission that we CMM and CPS held in Lingenau years ago, an elderly lady told me: “The mothers locked up

their daughters when Abbot Francis preached. They could not be detained and wanted to go to Africa with him right away.” He demanded a lot from the young women. Entering into the new sisters’ community was a radical undertaking at that time. One entered directly in South Africa. Abbot Francis was soon the most popular man because of his red beard: red hair was considered a sign of wisdom! We try to translate the founding mission into our time. One founding goal was to establish a Church in Africa that was fully alive – this goal has been achieved and is still capable of development.

In his zeal for mission, he went too far for the Roman authorities – he was deposed as abbot and had to retreat to the mountains, he chose the small village Emaus. There he built into the rocks the Stations of the Cross, which he prayed daily. He was not allowed to have contact with the Fathers or the Sisters. He writes after his deposition as abbot: “I was never calmer and more cheerful than today. When my suspension letter came yesterday, on the day of St. Athanasius, the great persecuted saint, I thought of this hero and was comforted.”

“If only Christ is proclaimed in every way, that is my joy,” and “Our mission area is a piece of Christ’s kingdom which has no boundaries.”

And, as if he had already foreseen the state of our world, “When will the world realize that it must return to simplicity if better times are to come?”

What does that mean for me, for each and every one of us? “If nobody goes, I go!” It depends on me, on each and every one of us that Jesus Christ is and remains alive in our world. Another Francis, the one of Assisi, makes the statement: “Proclaim the gospel, if necessary, use words!” If necessary: this means that the book which is read and understood by people in whatever language, is life, our lived testimony, our conviction. Jesus did not leave us a single written word, he left us the testimony of his life until the last drop of blood was given. And he left us his being-with-us until the end of the world.

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