

Human dignity. Who will help us to be Christians in modern Europe?

Dear friends!

Our main thesis is that in the life of a modern Christian two things are priority: the testimony of gospel love and respect for human dignity. These are interconnected things. We find these values in the question: "In what way should modern Christians to testify Christ's love?"

Galyna Teslyuk analyzed the emotions and feelings of the characters of the parable of the prodigal son in her speech. This view opens up the opportunity to look at this story through its characters. This view is from the eyes of an ordinary person, which allows you to look at the already known history from different angles.

The last speech proves that the Gospel stories are universal. Each of these stories can be opened to a person in a special way. The gospel contains a unique key, which operates in different epochs and in different cultures. In the parable of the prodigal son there are three protagonists and in the story of each of them we can take something for ourselves.

This parable contains important ideas that can be a guide or warning for a modern person. We read in the parable of the danger of the absolutisation of our own ideas, which reincarnate in false imaginations. Also, in this story we can see the ability to be mature and how a person is able to make responsible decisions in spite of mistakes and insults. We also see anger and insults, which in various cases can be constructive or destructive.

It is important for me to show that these ancient stories are useful for the evangelization of Europe in the 21st century. They do not lose relevance to the life of modern parishes. Christians returning to these stories better understand themselves and others. Why do biblical stories do not lose their importance?

For Christians, these stories are a powerful guide to becoming more intimate with God. Jesus Christ in his parables showed what spiritual maturity is. Therefore,

the wisdom taught by God is unquestioning authority for a Christian. However, these stories remain incomprehensible to a modern person who is not in the Christian context and who is not interested in the old texts. Such a person is remote from biblical stories culturally and spiritually.

We, the active Christians, must help the modern world once again feel the positive influence of biblical wisdom. Our help should be soft and unobtrusive. To show others how important it is, we must show how it works in our own lives. For those who are looking for the most effective way of witnessing Christ's love, using the Bible for this, two things are worth remembering: the Gospel, like the whole Bible, is immersed in a special historical and cultural context; The gospel needs to be re-inculturated for modern Europe.

From the story of the prodigal son, we see how important are the cultural characteristics of the time in which the action takes place in the parable. Without a good understanding of the traditions, the understanding of the parable will be incomplete. For two thousand years the family, social and political structures have changed. The Christian exegetical tradition, which in various times helped to make complex texts more understandable, is a great help and support.

This tradition must be alive and ready for rapid changes around. Therefore, those examples that were actual five hundred years ago may not be clear to modern humans. It is good to understand a world that needs evangelization in order not to waste its own energy in vain.

In the book "Christians in Europe," written by Kurt Koch 25 years ago in 1993, the author proposes three important steps that will make the Gospel more understandable for a modern Europe:

1. Our first step is to deal with the problems that exist in European societies. Koch calls the decline of human values, one of the key issues. Christians should not become moralizers and critics of everything new to deal with problems. An honest view of the world gives an understanding that there is no center that imposes certain

values on people. We, as the faithful Churches, must take advantage of the modern world and not turn away from them.

Man is born free and can make free decisions about which values to take. Freedom is the source of human dignity. Problems arise when values are interpreted unclearly. In this interpretation, the true meaning of human dignity may be lost. One of the important challenges of a modern Christian is the ability to clearly distinguish truth from untruth.

Freedom is a typical feature of modern society. The principle of freedom has helped to overcome various forms of authoritarianism. However, authoritarianism was replaced by the individualization and atomization of society. It is from these considerations people need to recover lost communications. Christianity with a new way of evangelization can help modern society and bring Jesus closer to the modern man. Gospel values will help distinguish true freedom from its distorted form, and help stop the manipulation of the notion of "liberty".

The deceased Ukrainian cardinal Lubomyr Husar defined liberalism as one of the forms of freedom. He criticized liberalism in the form in which it exists today in the West when a person interprets freedom in the form: "I can do everything I want," while black is called white, while white is black. First of all, clever liberalism can help Europe and the world get rid of the order that was formed by the traumatic experience of the 20th century. It is important that such liberalism considers human dignity and nature as the creation of the Lord.

The two truths will give an understanding of freedom for a modern Christian: the sacrifice of Christ and the will of God. Christ gave freedom to every person through his personal sacrifice. The will of God is determined for each person. This will protect the Christian from indifference to values, which is very widespread in modern society. From this perspective, past Eastern European societies were more honest when they stated that their world view was based on materialist Marxism-Leninism. Neutral world view for modern Western societies is often the only cover of their true world view, which is largely determined by the economy.

That is why the Christian must speak the truth and defend the Christian values without fear of clearly represent them. An indifferent society puts in one place any values, but at the same time demonstrates an equally indifferent attitude to each of them. It is worth mentioning separately the cult of success, which became for many people the purpose of life. In such situation, there is competition between people that is like market competition. In such cases, each has its own "price tag" that degrades human dignity.

German physician Arthur Jores showed in his research that the main psychological cause of premature death of many men is the awareness of the loss of public recognition. Because men tend to identify their personality with the results of their work. Kurt Koch relates the dominance of success today with patriarchal values that supplanted women's values such as: childhood (in a positive sense), emotionality and passivity. We see that these issues remain the subject of sharp public debate and in our time.

Another symptom experienced by Kurt Koch, which turned into a true social disease, is the omnipotence of the media and its transformation into a way of changing the world. As a result, people are becoming deafened, but not because of the lack of information, but because of its excess. Under the pressure of information manipulation, society is unable to properly perceive reality.

2. Our **second** step is to understand when there is a problem, then there is a way to cure it. Modern European Christians have a task to find ways to treat social problems. But treatment requires respect and love for someone who is ill. The mission of Christians to conduct a social dialogue and not be afraid to communicate with the world. Dialogue - when convincing and listen, not when then impose. Dialogue requires respect for human dignity, even if the other person has a different opinion. The imposition is a one-way process that despises the dignity of the interlocutor. Christ's disciples can spread gospel values in Europe in such a way as to emphasize the God given human dignity.

After the diagnosis is treated. European society can draw strength from a Christian source. Faithful of Church can begin to change the discourse in public, for this they need to restore solidarity among themselves. **Ordinary believers are called to return lost values to the public space.**

The German philosopher Albert Schweitzer, who was the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, defines culture as the material and spiritual progress of individuals and communities. In addition to the problems of our time, he counts the fact that normal human relationships became problematic. A person is in constant searches of material goods and has no time for dealing with other people. The modern person, by definition of Schweitzer, loses the feeling of kinship with humanity and thus becomes on the path of anti-humane. That is, we live at a time when spiritual progress in culture lags behind the material. The decisive factor in the ethical beginning in culture is lost.

The revival of human dignity should be based on concrete practical evangelistic steps:

- Respect for everything alive when a person feels another life as part of his own.
- The church must care for the poor and the suffering. Especially in a society where suffering is superseded by the ideal of life, which is free of pain.
- The Church can not engage in only talks about human values, it must cultivate them.

The cultivation of primitive human values is not the decisive task of the Christian faith in the modern world. Modern society tends to calculate benefits and costs. Dignity above values, because values can be variables, can be interpreted in different ways. Dignity is something invaluable that can not be exchanged or sold for money. Dignity is a gift of God. Dignity is so "expensive" that it is impossible neither to give it to anyone, nor to exchange it on the market.

This greatness of human dignity is embodied by God. Divine dignity has no value. God himself helps us to bear human dignity and to remain mature Christians in

modern Europe. Christians are called to bring this divine reality to other people, and this is the evangelizing mission of the Church to save human values and, at the same time, the best defense of human dignity. A Christian in the modern world must **restore contact with God, which will be an antidote to the depreciation of values.** It is important for European societies to recall the most valuable reality of God, which will most effectively protect human dignity.

3. Our third step is to think about the future, after realizing the problems and starting their treatment. We can ask a simple question: "What needs a special attention of Christians in the near future?" Our answer to this question is human dignity. Christians must constantly work on the **vision of the future.** The vision is aimed at the ideal, which one must strive for. Kurt Koch in his book offered a vision that focuses on helping. We are witnessing how many people, societies, and states need help, even in modern Europe. To give and to take, to sacrifice and to accept a victim, to help and to receive help are all so connected in Christianity, that together provides a healthy blood circulation of friendship. All this fills the person with dignity.

Assistance may be ambiguous, despite obvious good intentions. Obviously, the sign of the disciple of Jesus always was not domination, but ministry and help. However, ministry, help, and dedication can be a hidden form of domination. This happens when the ministry and help are not an end in themselves but are provided with selfish purpose and the idea of remuneration. In such situations, the neighbor is perceived as "material" for the cultivation of personal religiosity and piety. Such assistance does not consider the dignity of the supported person.

The help of a neighbor teaches love, it is necessary to learn love, because love is born only in the knowledge of another. So, to love it is necessary to know the dignity of another person. We must fully appreciate the meaning and effect of love, both in the life of the Church and in public life. Russian philosopher and theologian Vladimir Solovyov argues that the meaning of human love is the excuse and salvation of individuality through the sacrifice of selfishness.

Also, we should not idealize the state of modern Europe. Obvious are the problems of spirituality, worldview, values that are in the Old World. As we heard from the report of prof. Zulehner, where he analyzed the direction in which the Church is headed by Pope Francis, there are many things in contemporary Europe that are of concern.

The pope emphasizes freedom, justice, truth, that together with the peace are great achievements of European history. I agree with the prof. Zulehner that the Church today can be an advocate for these values before the modern world. Since I mentioned in my report about the inculturation of the Gospel in the modern world, I want to add that such inculturation should be based on clear values derived from the Christian tradition and continue to positively influence the modern world to this day.

Europeans have fought for their rights and dignity for centuries. We see this from the history of the struggle for freedom in Europe. In my opinion, the Revolution of Dignity, which took place in Ukraine, is a logical continuation of this struggle for freedom. Moreover, it is evidence that in modern Europe there are many pain points that need to be healed and the Church may be very helpful in this.

The crisis in modern Europe is not only a confrontation between liberals and anti-liberal forces. One can argue about the systemic crisis in Europe, which is experiencing a difficult period - this is stated by "The Paris Statement" issued by conservative European intellectuals. A philosopher Andriy Baumeister offers a qualitative analysis of "The Paris Statement", emphasizing that the unity of the Christian world relied predominantly on ideas, symbols, virtues (theological, ethical and civic), rather than on certain political power that allowed Europe to be formed as an open project.

In order to be Christians in the modern world, it is necessary to continue to base on the main ideas, symbols and virtues that ensure the unity of the Christian world. After analyzing "The Paris Statement" by Baumeister, it becomes clear that a false Europe is based on the principles of secular universalism, on the principles of

secular quasireligy, rather aggressive, authoritarian, even with elements of "soft" tyranny, which in turn makes a Europe as a closed project.

In my opinion, we should continue to look at Europe as an open project. At the same time, our Christian mission must be open, which means that we must support others in their desire to spread Christian values, but we should not try to forcibly replace one's values with others, because ideas in such a stillbirth form do not work.

To overcome the "globalization of indifference" of which Zulener spoke, we can by means of realizing the connection between God, our own Self, and our neighbors. In this triangle, there is energy that can become the soul of a rejuvenated Europe, an open Europe that can create, coexist, and be creative. To this end, I want to emphasize again the importance of individual sacrifice, which will help us to become better Christians.

The evil of egoism lies in the desire of the individual to attribute to himself unconditional value, and at the same time unfairly deny others in this value. This simple truth should be learned. After all, we see what bad consequences come in a society where a person despises another person. Such selfishness is inherent in every person, it can be overcome only by true love, and this requires effort. Under such conditions, an important precondition for helping is the use of Christian content in everyday activities. It consists in the practical implementation of the principle of "love for God - love for oneself - love for one's neighbor".

As a conclusion, one can say that being a Christian in modern Europe does not mean blindly following certain calls or values, but means a deep connection with God, which will reveal the dignity and dignity of others. Only a close connection with God, rather than abstract ethical considerations, can help Christians in following their own responsibilities of the disciples of Christ and in promoting the spread of the Christian faith in Europe.