

Message from Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

XXIII International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox spirituality

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

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in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

MESSAGE FROM OLAV FYKSE TVEIT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Dear Brother Enzo, Prior of the Community of Bose,

Your Eminences and Graces, Reverend Fathers,

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is an honour for me to greet you all on behalf of the fellowship of the World Council of Churches at the occasion of the 23rd International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality organized by the monastic community in Bose, in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches. It has become a longstanding tradition for the Monastery of Bose to address and examine spiritual dimensions that are essential to our daily lives. I am confident that the very timely theme you have chosen to reflect on this year, "Mercy and Forgiveness", will enrich and guide us in our common "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace".

Indeed, the latest developments in the tragedy of the desperate refugees fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and looking for safe haven invites us to meditate on the meaning of "mercy and forgiveness" in our personal spiritual life and at the level of our ecclesial institutions, as well as in relation to the role we need to play in the countries and states in which we live. The unbearable and inhuman violence that is so often being used in the name of religion and is destroying not only the humanity of its perpetrators, but also the social fabric of entire affected societies, requires that we look at mercy and forgiveness from God's perspective and not from our own human understanding, which sometimes seems incapable of forgiveness. Furthermore, our societies today are witnessing various forms of violence against women, children, and vulnerable minorities and so many forms of exclusion, including social injustice, where the gap between poor and the extremely rich has become unbridgeable. Greed is becoming more and more a commonly accepted value, not to say a virtue that is leading us to the overexploitation and the destruction of our environment. A renewed contextual theology of mercy is needed to address these challenges and so many others.

The concepts of the healing of memories and healing and reconciliation are, in my view, closely linked to the motifs of mercy and forgiveness. At key points during the journey of the ecumenical movement there have been occasions when churches have recognized the need for such healing and have deliberately and openly stood together before the Lord in a gesture of humility and openness to each other. My hope is that our experience in the ecumenical movement may offer an example that can be shared more widely.

In these critical times, probably more than ever, we are called to rediscover, and to recover our original human nature, which is in the image and likeness of God, our Creator. Our natural inclination to have mercy upon other people who are suffering comes from this. But for us, Christians, the natural feeling of mercy is empowered and strengthened by our belief that our Lord Jesus Christ was incarnated "for us and for our salvation" as a supreme act of love, mercy and forgiveness for the whole humanity.

In our common ecumenical journey on the "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" that the World Council of Churches has launched with its constituency and beyond, we join you here on your journey, where you will examine many existential questions that are relevant to the lives of our churches and societies. How do mercy and forgiveness relate to each other? Does the expression of mercy need to imply forgiveness? How do we relate as Christians trying to live the Gospel throughout history to the mercy and forgiveness which God granted us in his economy of salvation? Are mercy and forgiveness between human beings possible without justice and peace; and, how do we understand all these notions?

I look forward to learning more from the papers, discussions and reflections which are going to be published as proceedings of your conference and wish you a successful and spiritually enriching conference.

Sincerely yours in our common God and Saviour,

Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches