



In 2007 we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the death of the Servant of God, Giovanni Semeria (1867-1931), who is now in the process of being canonized. We would like to present to our readers the following short, but thoughtful, reflection by him written in 1925. This famous Barnabite typifies prophetic vocation and charism, and was unjustly accused of Modernism. Long before Vatican II, he promoted dialogue between the Church and the world, in all fields: science, philosophy, sociology, history, theology, politics, popular religion, biblical criticism and feminism. He called for the modernization of the liturgy, ecumenism, the democratic system, the autonomy of the Catholic laity in non-dogmatic matters and the study of the relationship between authority and freedom in the church.

In the following words, I hear an echo of Semeria's personal struggle during the Modernist Crisis (1900-1914), when he became the target of pitiless and overzealous "defenders of the faith." This reflection is taken from *The Gospels for the Feast Days (Evangelii della Festa, 1936)*, and was written as a commentary to the *Gospel of the Second Sunday of Easter (John 20:19-29)*.



Image by R. Kosek

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## Peace and Peace

by Fr. Giovanni Semeria, CRSP

Certainly, brothers, there is peace and there is peace. This must be said right at the outset to avoid any misunderstanding of the habitual greeting given by the Risen Lord. "Peace be with you," Jesus invariably tells the apostles, and the other disciples when he appears to them after his Resurrection.

The angels sang peace over his cradle, the lullaby of the newborn Babe. Likewise, peace is the lullaby of the Risen One. However, this time not the angels, but He himself announces and brings peace as the Victor, because true peace, a peace worthy of the name, is the conclusion of a struggle, a victorious conclusion.

Surely we may have what looks like peace, but actually it does not deserve the name. The peace of the desert, the peace of the ashes that hide a smoldering fire, the peace of the vegetation spread over a crater, ready to erupt at any time. All these images reflect historical situations... A nation squashes another and then proclaims peace. What an illusion, what a falsification... War is over, cannons cease to thunder, but people are still full of hatred, eager for revenge, yet peace is proclaimed! Far too soon.

All these kinds of peace are false, a mere sham. They are superficial and fictitious. This is not Jesus' peace. His peace is not something static, the peace of stagnant and putrid waters, a lifeless peace, without struggle or without victory. Politically speaking, this is the peace of nations closed in on themselves, who abhor getting involved. Economically



***“True peace must be conquered every day, every hour, every moment. It must be attained for others and for ourselves. Peace is equilibrium, but not equilibrium of lifeless things. These, once put in a place, never move; they are inert. Peace is the equilibrium of living things. It is the peace of the strong who do not look for conflict or a fight, yet are not afraid of it.”***

*Fr. Giovanni Semeria*

speaking, this is the peace of sluggish and fearful people, who remain in their poverty because they dislike risk and do not want to experience the hardships of fruitful work. Morally speaking, this is the peace of the weak who fear every form of struggle, every effort: it is the peace of pacifists, not of peacemakers.

We imagine that these kinds of peace come about automatically, whereas true peace cannot but come from our will dynamically. The Gospel itself may seem, in turn, an idyll of peace or a war song. Doesn't our Lord himself, at one point, say, "It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword?" (Mt 10:34). Wasn't he a powerful fighter, a fighter unto death, even death on the cross? His enigmatic words do seemingly contrast with his repeated offers and announcements of peace. But the enigma is readily solved when we recall St. Augustine's fine definition of peace: "Peace is tranquility, but not tranquility pure and simple; it is the tranquility of order and within order."

The original and principal ingredient of peace is then, not tranquility, but order. Tranquility, at all costs, eludes those who seek peace at all costs, that is, by compromising order, trampling on justice, warring against others and bringing war upon themselves, precisely because they are cowards and are selfish in their search for peace. Those who seek justice must fight for it, and they may appear as troublemakers. In reality, since they fight for order,

they are advancing the cause of peace, and may, ultimately, bring it about. Pacifists are not the same as peacemakers. It is the latter that Jesus proclaims blessed.

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