



in gaudio servire
in Freude dienen

ABT GEORG WILFINGER OSB

Stift Melk Benediktinerkloster 8. März 2016

Reflections on the Peace Vesper 2016 in Melk Abbey

Hospitality is a central element in Benedictine tradition. The Benedictine community in Melk Abbey, as it presents itself today, has maintained the magnificent baroque buildings not for its own benefits but to share it generously with as many people as possible. It is supposed to be a place frequently and gladly sought out by all people, irrespective of their origin and religion, a welcoming site where friendly exchanges can take place.

It was therefore our strong desire to host again, for the second time, an interreligious peace event on the occasion of this year's UN Interfaith Harmony Week. It was a special pleasure for me to have students of the School of Melk Abbey participate in the event - with three students providing the musical program and three students of Muslim faith giving statements on their dialogue experiences: one girl, that had just arrived a few month ago from Syria, a Kurdish girl from Turkey and a boy from Lebanon. Our school is supposed to be a place of encounter where students can experience the peaceful coexistence of human beings of different beliefs. I was also pleased that two of the Muslim refugees from Syria accommodated at Melk Abbey attended the Peace Vesper.

The enhanced presence and visibility of Islam in European countries poses us the question of how to build peaceful and good neighbourly relations. But as Christians we also have to ask ourselves what it means theologically for our own beliefs that several centuries after Jesus Christ's appearance on earth God revealed himself again to Mankind by sending the Koran that from a Christian perspective must be understood as the Revealed Word of God. We need open and hospitable rooms and occasions for encounters of people of different religions, especially Christians and Muslims, to engage in talks about these important questions. The Peace Vesper on February 1 in Melk Abbey may have been such an occasion.

Let me conclude by conveying, also in the name of the Melk Benedictine Community, our heartfelt thanks to H.E. Hussam AlHusseini, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for his noble initiative of a Peace event on the occasion of the UN Interfaith Harmoy Week.

Abt Georg Wilfinger OSB