

Press release n. 89

XXXIV EDIZIONE  
MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES  
*The Human Person: A State of Emergency*  
18-24 AGOSTO 2013 - RIMINI FIERA

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**The light shines in the darkness.***The witness of the Russian Orthodox Church during the years of the Soviet persecution*

Rimini, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013 - "This meeting with Father Vladimir Vorobev, rector of the Orthodox St. Tikhon is a great event for all of us", this is how Emilia Guarnieri, President of the Meeting Foundation, opens this meeting. The presence in Rimini of Father Vladimir Vorobev has its reasons in the Fifties and in the Sixties, when Father Giussani, talking with young people, commented the Russian choirs "and so," Guarnieri says, "in a full Soviet regime which renewed the persecution against the Christians, echoes of Father Vsevolod Spiller preaching began to reach us; Father Spiller preached conversion to Christ: 'we belong to Christ, while the world doesn't belong to Christ. We believe in the Word that was made Flesh.'"

Emilia Guarnieri remembers Father Giussani teaching in front of the icon of the Holy Trinity the communion within Christians and how he supported Father Romano Scafi in his work with Russia: "We share the essential, Christ, the Risen Christ, with Father Vladimir Vorobev; and it's for this reason that we listen to his story which tells us how light continued to shine even in seventy years of Soviet persecution". The exhortation of a dissident: "Have no fear of Solovki Isles; there, Christ is near." President Guarnieri reminds us of it and invites us to visit the exhibition "The light shines in the darkness. The testimony of the Russian Orthodox Church during the years of Soviet persecution" which is the result of the collaboration of several universities.

Imposing with his white long hair and beard, Father Vladimir Vorobev speaks in Russian to the audience in Auditorium B5 while Giovanna Parravicini from Russia Cristiana association translates carefully. At the time of the election of St Tikhon as Patriarch of Moscow, Russian Church was preparing for the persecution. And in 1917 the arrests and executions of priests, bishops and ordinary Christians began to spread: Father Vorobev gives a detailed and documented report. In 1990 a letter from Lenin dated back to 1917 was published: the Communist leader wrote that the best thing to do is to kill as many religious people and bourgeois as possible. Requisitions, destruction and lootings of churches and monasteries began. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1925 St. Tikhon died, probably poisoned, and his successors all end up in prison camps in Siberia. The persecution had a peak, with millions of deaths ("Nobody knows how many people died because there was no record"),

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in the years 1937/38. Father Vladimir Vorobev presents a series of portraits of monks and archimandrites (sometimes using mug shots) winded up in concentration camps and died as martyrs. Meanwhile, the Soviet schools taught that life was good without priests and monks and that they could live well because of science.

But how was it possible to keep faith alive? "There was a small and holy remnant that survived. True saints who had passed faith to young people. I was very lucky to get to know these people". Father Vladimir Vorobev continues its report accounting for his encounters with numerous "Starec," which were men full of grace who helped them to live as a Christian in spite of the persecutions which they were subjected to. He remembers Father Pavel who had the gift of clairvoyance (answering questions not asked); monk Tavknov which also received six hundred people a day (each of them found the solution to their problems from the words he spoke in his homilies) from the hermitage of Riga, Father Tikhon Pelich who confessed people incessantly.

These "Starec" were people with an unshakable faith, lovers of the Christ, who devoted much time to prayer: Father Seraphim began the Liturgy at six in the morning and ended at three in the afternoon. Continuing the list, Father Ioann Krestjankim, who was interned a long time with common criminals, among which he carried out his mission of conversion and, despite the most atrocious hardships (he almost died of hunger), he used to say that he was alright and in his will he wrote that everything is God's mercy.

The meeting concludes with the presentation of an "Icon of the martyrs and confessors of the Russian Church of the twentieth century", upon which the Church of today is grounded. The audience expresses its gratitude for this testimony with a long, interminable applause. Emilia Guarnieri thanks Father Vladimir Vorobev for sharing with us his faith which is an experience of communion. She calls then upon the signing of the appeal against the persecution of Christians.

The conclusion is still by Father Vladimir: "I am delighted that you have acknowledged my words about the martyrs. World can rely on faith only, although there are always the persecutions that The Christ has prophesied. "

(C.C.)

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