

## "Josef Engling, a peacemaker"

*French and German gathering  
Merville, 3 June 2007  
Homily by Mgr Gérard DEFOIS*

### ***Dear friends, brothers and sisters in Christ,***

Our gathering this evening is particularly moving because it unites us in the context of the two great global conflicts of the twentieth century. These "great wars" saw our people torn apart, our forces destroyed and our young people at that time killing each other. I must confess that I was deeply touched when I saw the external wall of the church at Merville several years ago and read the names of several of the young boys who gave their lives for their country. As you know, this Flanders region has been searched for shells and bombs over many years and our churches were also badly scarred.

But, our celebration tonight seeks to remember that in the midst of these waves of violence and hatred, spiritual flowers sprang up and grew under God's sun. Through the things that he asked of Fr. Joseph Kentenich who experienced the Gestapo prisons or Joseph Engling, killed by shellfire at the end of the First World War, the Schoenstatt Movement was rooted in these violent dramas and mankind's warlike spirit. Yes, in the midst of these outbursts of hatred and belligerent passions, these men, your founders were apostles of prayer to the Virgin Mary and self-sacrifice in the name of Christ.

All this is the wonderful design of the Spirit who is able to sow the treasure of love and the pearl of a reconciliatory spirit out of man's despair and the horror of their violence. In essence, all wars show a obsession with death, a blindness of the spirit with regard to human value and spiritual life. It is the blind logic of the violence of evil, a refusal to listen to the voice of wisdom and reason. We observe this with sorrow, more recently, in our own times, in Darfur where a State kills its children.

How can we not but be astonished when we read the prayer that Joseph murmured beneath a hail of bullets? When hunger, cold and fear of danger condemned this twenty year old youth to the reflexes of basic survival? Well, in this situation, he looked towards God and the Virgin Mary:

*"My beloved Mother, Mother Thrice Admirable,*

*I offer myself to you again as a sacrifice.*

*I dedicate all things to you, what I am and what I have,*

*my body and my soul with all of its abilities, all the goods that I own,*

*my freedom, my will ...*

*Allow that I offer myself as a sacrifice for the mission that you have entrusted to our Congregation.*

*In all humility, your unworthy servant. **Joseph Engling.***

Your congregation, your group and as well us, whom you have welcomed are united by this twenty-year old youth's testimony of an elevated and internal holiness. In situations of battle, hopelessness and general inhumanity he was able to find the audacity to live a spiritual life founded on offering, the gift of himself and the sacrifice of his life which he seems to have foreseen.

In his offering to Mary, he did not consider the risks that he would take nor did he abandon everything that he had, but considered only the future of this Schoenstatt Congregation. The only thing that he is concerned with is the imitation of the love that God has for his people and it allowed him to forget about himself to the point of ignoring danger. In this, we can identify with what Mgr Ratzinger wrote in 1982, prior to becoming Pope: *“The future of the Church cannot bear fruit unless there are people who entrench themselves in pure faith and live it”*. This is true in the case of Joseph Engling and also in Joseph Kentenich’s essence of spirituality. Peace for society and unity in the Church are the fruits of God’s intense presence, to the point of making himself an instrument of his love for mankind and peace that he offers to all.

Joseph Engling was a peacemaker in the darkest moments of battle and relentless death because he found a selfless simplicity in God, in prayer and in his self-sacrifice, so much so, that his work as a soldier was only a constraint which he took up with loyalty. But it must be stressed that his attitude of sacrifice was inspired by his Marian devotion. Furthermore, such a lifestyle must necessarily include a deep respect for the freedom of the other, since authentic sanctity cannot exist without a freely made commitment. We have just heard about complete dimension of such a gift in the Gospel and the two parables that were put to us: the man who buys a field to acquire a treasure must sell everything that he has in order to obtain the fine pearl. Does this not remind us of Joseph in his spirituality of sacrifice and the risks that he took for the future of his community, the Church and his congregation? Therein lies the message for Europe and for our parishes.

Joseph did not win peace by engaging in war, in responding to evil with evil and violence, but with the heart as he instilled love in his daily living through the nature of his prayer which lifted him up to the peace of God. He was neither a diplomat, nor an army general, but was merely one young man amongst other young men, close to God for the good of his friends. In this way, he received God’s grace to become a bearer of peace and reconciliation. And as a result of his determination we are gathered here this evening as bearers of peace and reconciliation. AMEN.

*Translation from French: Sarah-Leah Pimentel, South Africa*