Heart of David Conference

Warsaw: October 22, 2016

I think we all share a sense of excitement about this Conference. This anticipation has grown in me since I began my preparation for this talk. This theme “the Heart of David” takes us quickly into the heart of the Scriptures. I hope that what I share will help us all to enter more deeply into the heart of the Scriptures, which means into the heart of God.

As many of you know, in the last twenty years I have been led more and more into the question of the Church and the Jewish people, the Church and Israel. At the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church made its first steps towards recognizing the wrongness of any teaching or attitude that presented the Jewish people as rejected by God. This new opening was carried further by pope John Paul II who stated several times that the Jews remain our beloved brothers and sisters, for example: “the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and second parts of her Bible.” (Mainz, Germany, Nov. 17, 1980). Just a year ago, the Vatican issued a document for the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate, the document of Vatican Two that made possible a new encounter between the Church and the Jewish people. This new document entitled “Reflections” explicitly rejects the replacement teaching that the Church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people, as well as the “two-covenant” teaching that the Jews are saved by the first covenant and non-Jews by the new covenant.

These questions directly touch the relevance of king David for Christian life. What place has David in the life of the Christian churches? For most, the honest answer is “Not much”. Even

when we sing songs based on the Psalms, we probably are not thinking of David. When I began preparing this teaching, I examined first the places where David is mentioned in the New Testament. David is mentioned many times. This tells us something important about how David was seen and understood by Jesus himself and by the first disciples.

It is true that the historic Church in both East and West took over the psalms and made them central in their daily liturgies. But this usage was accompanied by replacement exegesis that understood – we can say misunderstood – the references to Israel and to Jerusalem as references to the Church that displaced the Jewish people and their heritage.

The Vatican document Reflections recognizes that “Arising from the same soil, Judaism and Christianity in the centuries after their separation became involved in a theological antagonism which was only to be defused at the Second Vatican Council.” (para. 17). Today there is an “increasing clarity” … “that Christians and Jews are irrevocably inter-dependent, and that the dialogue between the two is not a matter of choice but of duty as far as theology is concerned.” (para. 13).

This is a polite and diplomatic way of saying that the Christians and the Jews need each other in order that we can understand the biblical revelation correctly. In fact, the Jewish understanding of the Jewish Scriptures has been distorted through the Jewish rejection of Jesus (Yeshua), and the Christian understanding of both Testaments has been distorted by the Christian rejection of Israel (this applies to all Christians, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant).

Now let’s look at what this means in relation to King David. David is mentioned in the first verse of the first Gospel. “The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:

1). This beginning tells us that as son of Abraham, there will be a fulfilment in Jesus of the promises given by God to Abraham, and as a son of David there will be a fulfilment of the promises given to David. The promises to Abraham concern the people (descendants) and the land, the promises to David concern the kingdom, the coming Messiah-King, and by extension the city of Jerusalem.

The apostle Paul holds up Abraham as the father of all who believe (see Rom. 4: 11; also Gal. 3: 7 – 9), because Abraham believed the promises of God. David is also the man of faith, because he also believed the promises of God. The heart of David is a believing faith-filled heart, that entrusts himself to God's plan for his people – and through them for the world.

The faith of David is shown in the length of time between Samuel's anointing of the youngest son of Jesse as king in place of Saul (1 Sam. 16: 13) and his being proclaimed king of Judah in Hebron after the death of Saul (2 Sam. 2: 4). During all this time David did nothing to end the reign of Saul. He wanted nothing to do with the very human thinking of Joab and Abishai. Then after the death of Saul David had to wait six and a half years before he became king of all Israel (2 Sam. 5: 5). The man of faith waits on God to fulfil His promises in His way, at His time, and by His Spirit. The man who will exercise authority as king lives under authority, the authority of God and the misused authority of Saul.

The promises to David are not primarily personal promises for his own future. They concern the kingdom of Israel, they concern the house of David and the throne of David. In the words of the prophet Nathan: "your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam. 7: 16). These promises are presented as covenant promises in Psalm 89: "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: Your seed I will

establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations." (Ps. 89: 3 – 4; see also vv. 29, 36). The promise of the throne of David is repeated in the message of the angel to Mary at the Annunciation about the son she will bear: "He will be Son of the Most High, and he will sit on the throne of David his father." (Luke 1: 32). This promise to Mary captures something we Christians have largely lost through a replacement misinterpretation of the Old Testament. For this promise combines the divine element ("he will be Son of the Most High") and the human particular element ("the throne of David his father") that cannot be separated from Jerusalem and Israel. Was this promise in any way fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus? It seems that the answer has to be rather open: yes, an element of fulfilment but not yet a complete fulfilment. When Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, Matthew tells us "the multitudes cried out, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD." (Matt. 21: 9). We are told that the chief priests and scribes protest at this acclamation of the King of Israel, but Jesus disagrees and accepts this praise, replying, "Have you never read 'Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise.'" (Matt. 21: 16). Mark has an interesting variation on this acclamation: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the LORD!" (Mark 11: 9 – 10). Here what is coming is "the kingdom of our father David."

Further on in the New Testament, following the death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, David is mentioned again: "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you (the apostle Peter says) of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ [Messiah] to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing

this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses." (Acts 2: 29 – 32). See also Acts 2: 25 and 34 for further mentions of David.

This passage shows us that we cannot restrict the faith and heart of David and the promises God gave him to his own life-time and epoch. Neither can we limit the promises to the first coming of Jesus and the incarnation, as Christians have constantly done thinking that God has finished with Israel. It is here we face the serious effects of the total split and long antagonism between the Christian Church and the synagogue. The new and necessary encounter with the Jewish people puts us in touch again with "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28: 20), the Messianic hope for the final liberation of all creation from sin, and its "bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8: 21). God's whole work of salvation is accomplished by two comings of the Messiah, not one. This means we have among other things to understand the prophetic preparatory role of David in relation, not just to the first coming of Jesus at the incarnation, but also in relation to his coming in glory at the end of the ages. This raises the question as to when and where the Son of David will sit on the throne of his father David. In both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, Christians affirm that after his ascension, Jesus "is seated at the right hand of the Father." In Revelation 5, Jesus is associated with the throne of the Father (verse 6 the Lamb is seen "standing in the centre of the throne" and in verse 13 every creature is singing "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb"), but nowhere is it suggested that the throne of the heavenly Father is the throne of David. In a Jewish understanding, the throne of David is in Jerusalem; it is the throne of the king of Israel.

I think the Holy Spirit will lead the Church into this understanding as we heal the division, indeed the wound, between the Church

and Israel. For the Old Testament prophets the promised reign of the Messiah is to be one of righteousness: “Then I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is the name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Jer. 23: 5 - 6). Of the servant it is written in Isaiah “In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.” (Is. 42: 3c – 4). The heart of David is the heart of a righteous man. This links with the song of Zechariah in Luke’s Gospel: “The oath which He swore to our father Abraham to grant that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.” (Luke 1: 73 – 75). The phrase “the key of David” comes in the message to the church in Philadelphia: “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.” (Rev. 3: 7). This would appear to relate to admission to the kingdom, which is to a kingdom of righteousness.

We need to understand that the reign of David represents a massive change in the life of Israel. From being a collection of bonded tribes with considerable independence (evident from the book of Judges), they are formed into a people under one king and with their own capital city. When Saul dies, the people are divided: “the war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time.” (2 Sam. 3: 1). What made possible the ending of this conflict so that “All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, ‘We are your flesh and blood.’” (2 Sam. 5: 1)? It was David`s genuine grief at Abner’s funeral after Abner was killed by David’s right-hand men. “So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.” (2 Sam. 3: 37). David’s righteousness made him a man of reconciliation honoured by all Israel. It is significant

that the Israelites are able to capture Jerusalem only after this reconciliation. (2 Sam. 5: 6 – 10). In this way God was preparing for the united worship of Israel under the one righteous king.

The Sweet Psalmist of Israel

The second book of Samuel summarizes David, at the end of his life as "the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23: 1). Here we come to David's role in the worship of Israel, a decisive role, a foundational role. A key passage here comes from the book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, found in Catholic Bibles and in Protestant Apocrypha, written in the second century BCE. Sirach has sections on the great heroes of Israel. The first part of Sirach's eulogy of David concerns his role as courageous warrior, but after that Sirach says: "In all that he did he gave thanks to the Holy One, the Most High, with ascriptions of glory; he sang praise with all his heart, and he loved his Maker. He placed singers before the altar, to make sweet melody with their voices. He gave beauty to the feasts, and arranged their times throughout the year, while they praised God's holy name, and the sanctuary resounded from early morning." (Sir. 47: 8 – 10). These passages show us clearly that in the memory of Israel, David was above all the man of worship, the man who loved the Lord, the man who shaped and organized the liturgy of Israel (see also 1 Chron. 25: 1 – 2).

It was only with King David and the establishment of his capital in Jerusalem that it becomes possible for the whole people to celebrate the three major feasts of Israel in the place appointed by the Lord (see Ex. 23: 17; Deut. 12: 14). With a king and a capital city, major changes take place in the worship of Israel. It becomes possible and necessary to have a liturgy of Israel. This challenge faced David as he welcomed the ark of the covenant, the divine presence, to Jerusalem. Turn to Psalm 132, which

begins: “O Lord, remember David and all the hardships he endured.” (Ps. 132: 1). David swore to the Lord: “I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.” (Ps. 132: 4 – 5). “arise, O Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might” (Ps. 132: 8). See also Ps. 132: 13 – 14.

With this background comments, I would like to look at the different contributions of king David.

From the Scriptures we can identify different phases in the life and role of David. First, as a youthful shepherd, already able to play some musical instruments. Second, as leader of a band of rebels on the run from Saul, a time when several psalms were composed. Third, as king of Judah at Hebron. Fourth, as king of all Israel in Jerusalem, inspiring and organizing the liturgy of Israel, the feasts, the music, the teams of worship leaders – all of this before the Temple is built under Solomon. Just as the Lord was preparing David to become king, so the Lord was preparing David as a man of God dedicated to the worship of the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As David prepares to defeat Goliath, he professes his faith: “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. …Then all the assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.” (1 Sam. 17: 45, 47).

As a shepherd on the hillsides of Judah, David must have sung to the Lord. We are told immediately after he is anointed by Samuel, that he was “skilful in playing.” (1 Sam. 16: 18). During the years when David was being hunted down by Saul, he was singing songs that were called psalms as they found a place in the biblical canon. Over many of the psalms there is a note mentioning the circumstances of their composition: Psalm 18 “on

the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul."; Ps. 52 "when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul"; Ps. 54 "when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, 'Is David not hiding with us?'"; Ps. 57 "when he [David] fled from Saul into the cave"; Ps. 59: "when Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him"; Ps. 63 "when he was in the wilderness of Judah". Many psalms are just described as "A psalm of David" without any note of the occasion of origin. I was going to say their "composition," but composition fits better with a studio in Vienna than the hillsides of Judea. David did not just "compose" psalms in difficult and dangerous situations. He allowed the Holy Spirit to shape his human response – sometimes one of profound faith, of deep gratitude and joy, sometimes of deep longing, at other times of frustration. In the Psalms (and not only the psalms ascribed to David) we see expressed before the LORD the widest possible range of emotions and human situations: joy, anxiety, suffering, bewilderment, thanksgiving, trust, desperation, deep contrition for sin, acclamation of the greatness and glory of God with all the powers of mind and soul: read Psalm 150, which ends: "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD." (Ps. 150: 6).

This is a challenge to us in our communities, in our parishes and local churches, in the houses of prayer. Does our worship express the full range of human experience from desperation to confidence, from desolation to ecstacy that is expressed in the psalms inspired by the Holy Spirit? If it doesn't, it is probably because we are not bringing all our human experience, not just as individuals, but also as a people, as community, as church, before the Lord. There is a connection between being able to praise with all our being and being able to lament and grieve with all our being. We see this connection in people receiving laughter in prayer and receiving tears. Each helps to ensure the authenticity

and depth of the other. There is “a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.” (Eccl. 3: 4).

David was in a fundamental way the architect of the liturgy of Israel. I have already cited from the book of Sirach: “He gave beauty to the feasts, and arranged their times throughout the year, while they praised God’s holy name” (47: 10). The liturgies of Israel and of the early Church had a strong charismatic element in their origins. We see this in the formative influence of David. Pioneers were shaped by the Spirit, and their patterns provided the model for following generations. Neither in the time of David nor in the early Church did the situation exist where there are two completely different patterns of worship: one, liturgical and pre-determined, taken from a book with fixed rules (rubrics): and the other non-liturgical, free and officially without rules. Both in Israel and in the early Church, the earliest forms of liturgical worship (that is worship of the whole faith community) combined a passing on of what they had received and a receptivity to the Holy Spirit that was guiding the community of faith. In 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul writes about the Lord’s Supper or eucharist “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.” (1 Cor. 11: 23). What was received and passed on includes words and actions. But this was not totally fixed. The two different versions of the Our Father in Matthew and Luke reflect this handing on in the Spirit that is both faithful to what has been received, and yet is not just a rigid insistence on right formulae. This twofold pattern of receiving the heritage and openness to the creativity of the Holy Spirit was strongly present in king David. As king, David received the heritage of the patriarchs, of Moses and Joshua, and brought together the worship traditions of the tribes of Israel under one rule. This work of gathering and purification in obedience to the covenant of Sinai could only be done through the Holy Spirit. “Jerusalem … is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the

name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel." (Ps. 122: 4, a psalm of David). David was both charismatic worshipper and worship leader, and he was the first great liturgist, a liturgical founder and organizer.

This rich combination presents a big challenge to all churches and denominations, historic and free. One element in the challenge to the Catholic Church is how to introduce greater flexibility and allow for the creativity of the Holy Spirit within the church liturgy without opening the door to chaos and a naive experimentation that does not understood the depths of the heritage expressed in the ancient liturgies. The Church's liturgy is not handed down for us to do whatever we like with it. It is a great richness that the same basic liturgy with the same biblical readings is celebrated throughout the world on the same day, just as the Jewish people have the same Old Testament readings each Shabbat. But we have to learn again what David knew, what the shapers of Christian liturgy knew - how to shape a tradition in creative fidelity. This process happens naturally with family life in good Christian families, who pass to their children a way of living, not just a code of rules.

The challenge to the free churches, especially the charismatic free churches, is to recover a respect for tradition in its deepest sense of passing on the treasures of God to the following generations. This traditioning is inseparable from being faithful to the Scriptures. Immediately after the proclamation of the Shema "Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deut. 6: 4), that is recited in the synagogue liturgy three times each day, we read: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children." (Deut. 6: 6 – 7). It is not helpful to use the word ritual only as something negative and lifeless. Likewise with the term tradition. Ritual and tradition are about fidelity to what has been handed down. But the

faithful handing down through the generations is impossible without the Holy Spirit, rained down from above, the Spirit who is always creative, as Pope Francis keeps insisting. Christian worship does not have to be re-invented every few years. Think about the paradox: the need for new wine each year with new wineskins, but the old wine is better. The new wine does not replace the old wine!

All this underlines the fact that we Christians need each other. We need each other to be faithful to what the Lord has entrusted to us. This is not relativism or indifference to truth. The Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutrheran church, and the free churches all have to ask: What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the others? Instead of starting from what is wrong or problematic in other Churches, we start from the work of God. Pope Francis has said that ecumenism is “not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.” (Evangelii Gaudium, para. 246).