

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter (B-2021)*

For another Sunday of Easter, we hear the Lord wishing his fearful apostles: ***Peace be with you!*** In Hebrew, the word for ‘peace’ is ‘shalom’, a traditional Jewish greeting. But ‘shalom’ means so much more than what’s conveyed in English. It refers to the fullness of peace: contentment, wholeness, harmony. So true peace isn’t just the absence of war or conflict—it’s something internal. As Jesus said, *“Not as the world gives do I give it to you.”* Earthly peace is only temporary, but the peace of Christ is eternal. True peace is the tranquility of order, and it’s a fruit of the Holy Spirit. So, where we find a peaceful person, we find someone filled with the presence of God, for the peace of Christ produces an interior union with God Himself. Real peace comes from God alone, which is why we’ll never have world peace until we individually recognize and affirm the power of God.

For 2 Sundays, we heard that His first words to His apostles after the crucifixion and resurrection were: ***“Peace be with you”***. Christ’s peace is the fruit of the redemption that He achieved by his death and resurrection. But after receiving this gift of peace, what did these same apostles do a short time later? They preached the good news . . . and they were martyred. One was crucified upside-down, another was skinned alive, another was thrown off the temple and then clubbed to death. Not the most “peaceful” results. In this life, Jesus promises us two things: peace and the cross. The peace of Christ is not freedom from the cross; it’s the ability to carry our crosses well.

St. Thomas a Kempis said: *“For there is no other way to life and to true inner peace than the way of the Cross and of daily self-denial ... If you carry your cross well, it will carry you to eternal life”*. And that’s the other thing Jesus promised to us: eternal life, to those who believe in His name and who keep His commandments. But peace also occurs elsewhere in Scripture, for example, when Jesus commanded His disciples to wish peace when visiting someone’s home: ***“Peace be to this house”***. St. Paul begins almost all of his letters with a salutation of peace: *“Grace and peace to you...”*. And peace was the message proclaimed by the angels on Christmas night: *“Peace to people of good will”*.

One of the most powerful moments at an ordination Mass is the exchange of peace given by priests or deacons. It’s a symbolic welcoming into the order of deacons or the order of priests. And because we’re body and soul, we use external signs to convey internal realities. (Some of us are truly missing our exchange of peace ... but keeping peace also means keeping each other safe.)

The opposite of peace is anger. Let’s be honest: we live in an angry and tribal culture. It’s becoming almost impossible to have a rational debate without any name calling. And sometimes we try to justify ourselves by saying that Jesus got angry. Yes, Jesus got angry—we call it ‘righteous anger.’ He got angry at the hardness of some people’s hearts. He got angry when the rights of *others* were being violated, not His own. On the other hand, most of us get angry when we feel our own rights are being threatened, and this stems from our inherent self-centeredness. How do we know whether anger is selfish or righteous? Anger becomes righteous instead of sinful when it becomes courageous in the face of evil. It’s very fitting to become angry when innocent persons born and unborn are murdered, and when we witness other injustices.

But we have to channel that anger into prayer for the conversion of sinners, beginning with ourselves, and to work for justice. The best way to manage anger is to say in confession, *“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.”*

There's a strong desire for peace in every human heart. St John XXIII (often called the Pope of Peace) said: "*The world will never be the dwelling place of peace, until peace has found a home in our hearts, and until each of us preserve in ourselves the tranquility of order ordained by God*". So, we have to cultivate peace in our families and be reconciled to one another. It's easy enough to say 'peace' to a family member, or even a stranger at church, but do we live out that peace when we're not in church? How do we overcome anger and live a peaceful existence? Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God*". I think we have to begin with gratitude. Gratitude helps us to overcome anger, because gratitude focuses our attention on all that we've received from God and others. And increasing gratitude will help us to control our thoughts, feelings, and desires. Gratitude will bring us back to peace. St. Paul's words are a good way to close this sermon: "*Insofar as it concerns you, try to live peaceably with everyone*".