

My Peace I Give You

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have come to learn from my years in grade school, high school, college, and graduate school that teachers would do two things to ensure their students understand and grasp any topic or subject.

Teachers would first introduce and explain a topic in class. Then they would entertain questions from their students in order to clarify what was taught. In doing so, they carry everyone along.

Jesus had taught his disciples to love one another. He taught them about sacrificial love to the point of death on the Cross. But he knew that it would not be easy for his disciples to grasp his teaching, and so in today's gospel Jesus makes a second prediction of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. He stresses the role of the Holy Spirit as a teacher who will clarify what he taught his disciples. It is in this role that we trust the Advocate to preserve Christians from error and keep them close to the mind of Jesus.

We see the evidence in our first reading that not only is Christ with his Church, but it is also guided by the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were faced with the issue of whether Greek converts needed to practice Jewish observances in order to be saved. They came to a decision which signifies that God's saving love reaches out to all people through Jesus Christ. Their decision brought peace to the early Church, especially to the Gentiles. This would not have been possible without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I remember that, as a student, whenever I came to fully understand the full scope of a topic I felt a sense of joy, fulfillment, confidence, and peace. Essential to these feelings were my teachers' clarifications. In the same way, essential to the peace that Jesus gives is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Notice the flow of Jesus' message to us in our gospel. With the final assurance of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus grants his disciples his peace. It is a peace based on the coming of the Spirit. It is not the peace of the world, so often only an alleviation of worldly want or stress. It is the peace of being freed from sin and united to God, the only complete fulfillment of our wants.

Like the early Church, all of us here at Holy Trinity parish and St. John's represent diverse views and needs and interests, yet we are called to be a community seeking the gift of peace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The important thing is for us as a parish to continue to grow in hospitality when we gather for worship. The ritual of the Sign of Peace is not intended to be an opportunity to just say hello to others who gather. It presumes we are already united in worship, functioning as the Body of Christ together. We are reminded in the Sign of Peace that we share in Christ and prayerfully wish one another a full measure of that peace from the depth of our hearts. Some people complain that this ritual distracts them from preparing for communion, but that reflects an inadequate understanding of communion as involving only Jesus and the individual. We are joined in the body of Christ through baptism, and we share in the sign of peace as we prepare to be united to Christ as well as our brothers and sisters in Christ in Holy Communion.

Peace be with you.

Fr. Anthony Ahamefule
Parish Priest