

EASTER SUNDAY VI “C”
MAY 25/26, 2019

Following the Lord’s Prayer here at Mass and prior to the action of the Breaking of the Bread in preparation for Holy Communion, comes the prayer for Peace. In it we hear the words of promise of Jesus in today’s Gospel: “***Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.***” (Jn. 14:27) Just what is this “peace” Jesus promises in today’s Gospel and which he renews in each Mass?

Jesus answers that question stating that his “peace” is not one according to the standards and practices of this world. Such peace is usually established following conflict—military, economic, political, or personal relationship after one party has been beaten into submission and the victor imposes his or her will upon the one subjected. Such “peace” sows seeds of resentment and revenge on the part of the subjected party and results in years, or decades, of plotting to “even the score.” Or, sometimes parties simply agree to cease hostilities forging an uneasy armistice. While hostilities have ceased, there still remains suspicion and mistrust with the threat of renewed hostilities at any time. No, this is not the peace Jesus offers.

The peace Jesus offers is not one imposed by a “winner” (God) on a “loser” (sinful humanity or myself as sinner) with God dictating terms for maintaining a non-conflictual relationship. Nor is it some type of an armistice; God and us staring each other down in an uneasy test of wills.

The peace Jesus offers is invitation to relationship with him in his love for his Father, the Father’s reciprocal love for him, a love that is itself personal and divine, the Holy Spirit, as he speaks about it in today’s Gospel. Jesus tells us that if we choose such relationship we gain entrance through him into the intimacy of the inner life of God: “***Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.***” (Jn. 14:23) This love, this ***peace***, this relationship, this indwelling, in God is one that no power in heaven or on earth can take from us as St. Paul proclaims in the eighth chapter of his Letter to the Romans when he states that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm. 8:29-39).

Especially important for us is the context in which Jesus speaks, and offers, God's gift of peace to us. The setting is the Last Supper. Ahead of Jesus lies his wrestling with staying faithful to his mission and the Father's will through his agony in the garden; his arrest, trial, his physical and psychological suffering; the way of the cross, crucifixion, abandonment and death. Through it all Jesus holds fast to his relationship with the Father, this same *peace* he offers his disciples and us as we too face the temptations, trials, sufferings, and crosses of our lives. Jesus' gift of *peace* does not guarantee a life of non-conflict or trial, but it is the pledge of God's faithfulness to us at all times, in all circumstances, that we are not alone; that God does not abandon us, even though we might not emotionally feel the divine presence, and that, in the end, like Jesus we ultimately triumph in God, that life is stronger than the power of death. This is what Jesus' own Resurrection proclaims. It was in living in this *peace* that Nelson and Winnie Mandela received the strength to endure and, ultimately, non-violently bring an end to racial apartheid in South Africa; that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. received strength and courage as he endured hatred, violence, and opposition in his advocacy for racial equality here in our country, and later in his ministry opposition to the Vietnam War; that gave Venerable Dorothy Day courage as she confronted an often deaf response and opposition from some bishops in the church in our country in her calls for them as leaders to embrace the body of the Church's social teachings on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised.

This is the gift of peace Jesus offers us today as we live and witness to him in our time and place. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta states it best: ***“Do you really know the living Jesus—not from books, but from being with Him in your heart? Have you heard the living word he speaks to you? ...Ask for the grace. He is longing to give it. Never give up daily intimate contact with Jesus as a real living person—not just an idea. He loves you, even more—He longs for you.”***

Peace be with you!