

The Peace of the Lord

Today's Gospel reading can be seen as having two parts to it. The first part is an answer to a question that was posed to Jesus about how He will reveal Himself to the disciples but not to the world. In a way, this question is a follow up from last week's Gospel reading where Jesus gave His followers a new commandment, to love one another as Jesus had loved them. After giving them this commandment, Jesus then begins His last discourse to the disciples, basically telling them what is about to happen and giving them instructions on what to do after He is gone. While making the point that He and the Father are completely united in everything and that He speaks for the Father because the Father has sent Him to this world, Jesus continues this theme of love as He answers the question of about being revealed. If this sounds confusing, which it can, Jesus assures us that the Holy Spirit, or Advocate, will be sent to us to help make sense of everything. The short answer to the question is that because of our love for Jesus, we will recognize what He has done for us.

The second part of this reading is where Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." Jesus goes on to say that He doesn't give as the world does. If Jesus has given us this peace, why don't we see it today? One only needs to point to hostilities around the world; or the divisiveness within our governmental bodies; or the mass shootings at supermarkets and churches and schools; or even to feuds within families to see that there is very little peace in the world. It may be difficult to see, but the peace that Jesus gives is to those who accept His peace. Just as Jesus touched and changed the hearts of individuals and not to a whole nation of people at once, it takes an individual response to this peace. The

peace of the Lord is a peace that cannot be forced upon others; people have to have love for Jesus first.

So, what kind of peace is this? Just as the love of Jesus did not require anything of the person either before or after Jesus helped them, the peace of Jesus also does not require anything in return. It's the kind of peace where, as in the 23rd Psalm, the Psalmist can enjoy a feast set before him by the Lord even though he is surrounded by his enemies. It is the kind of peace that can still whatever storm we find ourselves in; whether it is of our own doing or a storm we get thrown into; being given the assurance that the storm will not last and that it will not define who we are. It is the kind of peace where we know the outcome regardless of whether we 'mess' things up or not. A peace that tells us that despite our 'mess-ups' we are still loved by God and still one of His children. It is a peace where forces that are against God will do anything to disrupt that peace, to make it seem as if it is only a pipedream.

In our service, we routinely 'share the peace.' Originally, it was a way to grant and receive forgiveness for a transgression against or by a neighbor, keeping in line with the admonition that before we bring our offerings to the altar, we should make peace with our brothers with whom we have a quarrel. If it isn't used in this way (which it typically isn't any more, sometimes it is used to greet someone we didn't get a chance to say 'Hi' to earlier), at least we can use it to wish a person may find peace from what troubles them.

This peace of the Lord is not the same kind of peace that we find in the world where the peace is based on something else. To have peace, the world demands that we must do what the powers that be say we must do or face the consequences. For example, the peace of Rome only was peaceful if you followed the Roman's rules. If not, then the strength and brutality of the Roman army

would let you know that you erred. Like this Pax Romana, any peace that the world's powers establish does not last. Any empire and any peace treaty, if it is not truly based on the love of God will end at some time. The love of God is eternal. When we strip away all the nightmarish imagery in The Book of Revelation, we see that despite all the forces that try to disrupt the peace of the Lord, it will prevail in the end.

We live in an age where our identities can be confused and confusing, with many voices trying to tell us who we are; what we must and must not do; who to be mad at for the ills of the world and our lot in life; what we have to do to be part of the 'in crowd' - all the while these voices are wanting something from us, usually taking something from us. There will be voices promising us that if we get this or that or do a certain thing, then we will have the peace we seek, a peace that only they can provide. In Jesus, we hear the opposite; we hear a voice that gives us hope, promises a true peace. A voice that tells us that we are His, a voice that calms whatever storm we may be facing, either from without or from within ourselves, a voice that invites us to just be still and to follow Him. A voice of Good News, indeed.

In just a while, Barrett will be affirming the promises made on his behalf at his baptism. We will pray that he will receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit that will help him stay true to his love for God, helping others in their own journeys of faith so that he and others may live in the peace of the Lord despite what obstacles may appear on that journey of faith.

May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive the real peace of Jesus.

YouTube links:

Gospel and sermon: <https://youtu.be/pp903LdKXHq>

Service: <https://youtu.be/3RK1E86gDJ0>