

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (2024 - B)

Shortly after we recite the Lord's Prayer, at each Mass the priest says, **"The peace of the Lord be with you always"** to which you respond **"And with your spirit."** Then we are directed by the deacon or the priest to **"offer each other the sign of peace."**

And just before this exchange, the priest says:

"Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will."

These words and actions at Mass are inspired by the words of Jesus Himself who said to His two disciples on the road to Emmaus, **"Peace be with you."** Also, twice on that first Easter, Jesus said the very same thing to the Apostles, **"Peace be with you."**

So why did Jesus say this and what did He mean? And why do we imitate Him and say these very same words at Mass, and what do we mean by them?

We can get some answers to these questions if we first consider what the disciples and the Apostles were feeling and thinking when Jesus spoke to them.

The two disciples mentioned in today's Gospel were filled with a deep sadness. They were sad because their Lord had been put to death, and with His death their hope for a new kingdom of peace and justice had also died. At the same time, they were very confused, and they were confused because they had just heard reports from the holy women who told them that the Lord's tomb was empty and also that angels had told these women the Lord was alive. Clearly, these disciples were not at peace.

In a similar way, the Apostles were filled with a deep sadness, but they were also very much afraid, so much so, that they had locked themselves in the upper room, and they had no idea what their next move would be. For the last three years, they had followed Jesus and had learned from Him. They had come to believe that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16)." But now, their Lord was dead, and clearly, the Apostles were not at peace.

Now when you think about it, these two accounts don't really show us what peace is; they only show us what peace is not. They give us a negative definition, and that's kind of how we think about peace today. We say that peace is the absence of war, that you have peace when you don't have conflicts. But again, that doesn't tell us what peace is, only what peace is not.

It's like saying it's light when it's not dark, or something is dry when it's not wet, or someone is satisfied when they are not hungry. In these examples, the qualities of "light" or "wet" or "satisfaction" are all defined in terms of what they are not, and that's how we generally understand peace. We think of it as the absence of war and conflict and turmoil.

But suppose we turn this around and say that war and conflict and turmoil are the absence of peace? Then peace becomes some thing, then turmoil becomes the absence of tranquility, and war becomes the absence of peace.

That said, here is my point:

Peace is something, and in a Christian sense, peace is something we have. In fact, in a Christian sense, peace is not only something we have, but it's also something that we can share and give to others. As Jesus Himself said and as the priest prays at Mass,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” He went on to say, **“Not as the world gives do I give to you. [So] let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (Jn 14:27).”**

So, what is peace? Peace is communion with Jesus Christ. To put it another way, peace is the possession of Jesus. Peace is when the Lord lives in us and we in Him. It is the case that God is not just near to us, but that He dwells in us spiritually. Also there is this. Remember what Jesus said about Holy Communion? **“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him (Jn 6:56).”** This means Jesus is also with us and dwells in us Sacramentally when we receive Him worthily in Holy Communion.

So to have peace is to have the Lord. It is to possess the living God, and this leaves our hearts full. As one Eucharistic hymn says, “I received the living God, and my heart is full of joy.”

Often in life, we are troubled. Things happen that knock us off balance. One of the kids gets sick, or we have car trouble. Sometimes things don't go well at work. The furnace conks out. Friends have marriage problems. Someone we love gets cancer. We get laid off. Someone we care about very much has gotten into drugs or porn.

There are problems in the world, and these troubles are real, and we all have them. They are the crosses of life, and they disturb us. They upset our tranquility, but we must not let them overshadow the fact that at the same time, we still have the peace of Christ.

Remember the Apostles in the upper room? Remember the disciples on the Road to Emmaus? Their problem was that they had lost sight of the peace they possessed. The Lord was always with them. In the midst of their trials He was still there. He had not abandoned them.

In fact, Jesus said to them, **“Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.”** On hearing those words, we are told the disciples were filled with joy.

So, when you are troubled and when you are not at peace, here's what you need to do. First, examine your conscience and see if there is some serious sin in your life. The Lord cannot abide with mortal sin, and that's because we have chosen to love someone or something else more than God, and in so doing, we have cast Him out and closed the door to Him.

If that is why you are not at peace, there is a very simple solution. Go to confession. Open the door and let the Lord back into your heart.

Now, on the other hand, if you are troubled and not at peace and the source is not sin, then this is what you must do. Remember that Jesus said **"I will not leave you as orphans (Jn 14:18)."** Recall as well that the Lord said, **"I am with you always (Mt 28:20)."** Finally, remember that He said, **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16:24)."**

So, when you find yourself troubled and not at peace, and your lack of peace is not because of sin, remember that the Lord is with you, and instead of becoming fearful and sad, turn to Him and with confidence simply say, "Lord, I know you are with me now and always. Please help me to carry this cross and offer up my suffering to you. Help me not to lose sight of the fact that you are with me always."

Also, don't forget that the devil will use our trials and tribulations to upset us. He will lie to us, and he will tell us that God is not there or that God has forgotten us.

Let me tell you a little story. I once knew a lady who lived to be 105. She was in a nursing home and in poor health, and when I would visit her and bring her Holy Communion, she would say to me, "Father, I want to die, Jesus has forgotten me." But I would tell her, "No Josie, he hasn't. He knows where you are, and He is with you and He loves you. So just be patient and be ready when He calls you."

My point is, don't fall for the devil's lies when he says to you that you are alone and abandoned when things aren't going right. Don't listen to him when he says that God doesn't care about you. Those are just the devil's lies.

One last thing. On that first Easter, when Jesus said a second time to the Apostles, **"Peace be with you,"** He then said, **"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."**

It is our task, our calling to share this peace of Christ with others. God wants us to bring Christ's peace to those who live in darkness and to those who are ensnared by the devil's lies. So then, let us all consider how we will do this when we exchange the sign of peace today. Amen.