

St. Mary's/3-29-20/John 16:33a/Fr. Free+

Jesus said: "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace."

+In the name of the Father, and of
the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.+

In the Tale of Two Cities, it was Charles Dickens that wrote: "We live in the best of times, and in the worst of times." Surely Dickens sensed a time in which the world was enlightened, had all it needed, but lacked much in credulity.

We must feel like this now, in that over a month ago, the USA was clicking along (not all things perfect), but nonetheless intact. Now with our crisis we feel that this is the worst. NY is at the epicenter of the pandemic crisis. We are forced to quarantine and ride this storm out.

We yearn for a solution and end to this awful pandemic, and every day I hear of those I know, or ancillarily find out are infected or being tested. It is a test for us as much, as we deal with this crisis, not just in NY, but beyond.

We find ourselves searching for peace as we sequester ourselves, search for food and water, and hope to keep a strong face in our 4 walls we live in.

The question we ask is: what is real peace? Even before COVID-19 we were concerned with world politics and stability, but now a life-threatening virus. Where is there peace? What is peace?

In the bible, peace in Hebrew is: Shalom. In Greek: **eirénē**. In biblical meaning, peace is: "Fullness, well-being. Translation of shalom, a Hebrew term used for both greeting and farewell with great richness of meaning. It is much more than a lack of war and points to full societal and personal well-being, coupled with righteousness and possible only as a gift of God." (McKim, Dictionary of Theological Terms, pg. 205)

So, we see that peace is a sense of fullness, well-being, a word for greetings, farewells, but also past calamities, but God's righteousness that only he can give. That seems heady and a lot to take in.

This may help. Our Lord speaks to us in the Upper Room, by saying that the peace he leaves with us, is not from the world, but only from him. Our peace then, is totally extrinsic from the world. The world will never give you peace, only perceived peace.

The pandemic can end tomorrow, the Dow back up and people working and so forth, but we could still not have this peace that Jesus gives. Not to say, that we do want all of this to happen and do want world peace in this situation, because its only natural. It would bring peace to us for an end to the pandemic, and we so pray for that! But there is more.

There is a deep-seated peace we are offered to tap into: The Peace of God that passes all understanding, that Jesus offers and we just can't explain it. If all turns around and we are back to normal in 3 months, we will certainly have peace; however, it will not and never be the deeper peace Jesus gives, because only he can give it and the world can never give it.

Consider the following true story.

In 1871, a successful businessman and lawyer lost all his material possessions in the great Chicago fire. This did not trouble Horatio Gates Spafford very much, for he had set his affection on "things above." However, two years later, when his wife and children were on board the Ville du Havre en route to France, their ship was rammed by an English vessel and sank, claiming the lives of 226 people. Although his wife survived, all four of their children perished in the icy waters.

The man was given the tragic news and later shown the spot in the mid-Atlantic where the shipwreck occurred. Although heartsick with grief, Mr. Spafford suddenly felt an inrush of supernatural peace and comfort as he looked to the Lord for strength. With tears streaming down his face, he picked up a pen to record his feelings, and from his well-blest heart flowed these thrilling words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,

when sorrows like sea billows roll;

whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,

'It is well, it is well with my soul.'

We are all having to re-think everything, both physically and spiritually. What really matters in life? Life really matters and that is what we are all dealing with and hoping to be solved. This thought is very incarnational. But the 2nd level is spiritual, in that we are all searching for ways to deal with our crisis, as we hear from friends and family across the city, state and country being succumbed by the virus.

I would submit, that the only way we can keep sane and really rise to the occasion in our faith in God, in gaining a peace which passes all, is to realize that Jesus gave, is giving and continues to give us something the world cannot give: this peace of God, which seeks to protect and love us and help us.

Maybe this is the time to....let go of our alter-ego, the worldly one that is overwhelmed by the crisis, and let God be God to us. To press into our faith like others did in past calamities that threatened the world. To tap into God's peace, which he freely offers and is giving at this very moment.

I have commented to many that the worst thing for us as a church family is not being able to gather...to catch up, to worship, to receive the sacrament. For me the Sequence Hymn is always a wake-up call to hear the word of God. And my favorite Sequence Hymn is: Be Thou My Vision. The last lyric: "High King of heaven, when victory is won, may I reach heaven's joys, bright heaven's Sun! Heart of my heart....whatever be-fall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all."

The High King is Jesus, who gives us vision, vision and reality of the peace he gives that only He can give and the world can never! If we use this time to tap into and receive God's peace in Jesus, then it can be a foundation for the future in our lives, to gain momentum in handling whatever may be-fall, now and forever. Now is the time to meditate on the higher things in life, so let us all take the opportunity, reaching into God as best we can, asking for the peace of God in which he can only give thru Jesus Christ. This is our time to get it!

So, my friends, as we face all of this together, know that God is with us.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, be thou our vision. Help us to see, feel and experience your peace like no other time in our lives. Be our vision to see what you have, no matter what the world dishes up. Be the lord of our hearts, the vision of our souls and help us to see the bright heaven's Sun, as we handle this ordeal and maintain our health and faith. Because only IN YOU can we have real peace!

The peace of God be always with you.

I remain,

Yours in Christ,

Father Free+

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.+