

021 Second Sunday of Easter A Edited

Peace be with you!

Reflecting on today's Gospel, I was struck by the risen Jesus' greeting to his disciples when he first appeared to them, which he repeats a week later when he appears to them again: 'Peace be with you.'

Indeed, the great gift of the risen Christ, of Easter, is peace: As Jesus says in John's Gospel (14:27): 'Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you.'

And how sorely our world needs the peace of Christ this Easter! Earlier this week a world leader threatened to destroy an entire civilisation, and he has the firepower to realise that threat. Thankfully the threat did not materialise but the situation in the Middle East, and the danger to the entire world community, is still very real.

So if peace is the great gift of the risen Christ to the world, why is there so much conflict, and so little peace?

Well, for the peace of Christ to be real in our world, there are certain things that humans must do to facilitate the flow of God's peace.

Firstly, we must pray for peace. Peace a divine quality – God's gift – unattainable by our efforts alone. We must pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and of our world.

This is expressed beautifully in Psalm 122

'For the peace of Jerusalem pray
[and we can add 'for the peace of our world pray']:
Peace be to your homes!
May peace reign in your walls,
in your palaces, peace!
For love of my brethren and friends I say:
Peace upon you!

The importance of prayer for peace has been highlighted by Pope Leo who has invited everyone to join him in a Vigil of prayer to pray that the diplomatic efforts to find peace in the Middle East may bear good fruit.

And the second important thing the Bible tells us is that peace and justice are reverse sides of the one coin. There can be no peace in situations of injustice. Maybe not outright war or conflict. But not peace.

We see this link between peace and justice in the psalms: For example, Psalm 122: 'Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced.' And Psalm 72: 'In his days justice shall flourish and peace till the moon fails.'

So for peace to be realised, we must work for justice globally, locally and individually. We must examine our own lives to make sure that we are not acting unjustly towards anyone.

And thirdly, there must be mercy and forgiveness if we are to have peace.

We have to acknowledge that justice has its limits, because in conflict situations neither side feels that justice is achieved. We must work for justice but also go beyond it to embrace mercy and forgiveness. In the end peace can only come when one side, or preferably both, can say, 'we forgive you for what you have done. Let us try to move forward together.'

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we pray for all nations and peoples and individuals in conflict – that the way of peace can be found with God's grace. A way of peace that is always dependant on divine mercy, but also on our mercy.

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