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John 14,23-31

Pentecost — 24 May 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Second lesson from the Gospel According to Saint John, which was read earlier:

[Jesus said to His disciples:] “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: What do we think of when we hear the word “peace”? More often than not, we think of the absence of war. That kind of thinking is common, since that is what the ancients thought of as well. If there was peace, if there was no war, then goodness and plenty would be humankind’s state of affairs.

There have been studies on how often people have been at peace with one another. At various times, historians have calculated how often during recorded history people have been at peace. For example, since about 3600 BC, or for about the past 5600 years, the recorded world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period of time there have been 14,321 wars, large and small, in which some 3.64 billion people have been killed.

Mind you, this depends on written records. If we could find all the instances of war, then I am sure that the numbers of wars would

increase, the years of peace would shrink still further and, equally unfortunately, the number of people killed would increase.

But we also speak of peace in relation to ourselves. We speak of “peace of mind.” Again, this is an elusive quality. The ancients had their stoic philosophy, in which the idea was to keep a stiff upper lip in the face of all personal calamities. Or perhaps Eastern philosophies in which the idea is that we can keep calm because the world is actually an illusion. Somebody pinch me, please. So much for illusion.

But in today’s Pentecost text, Jesus promises peace. Indeed, He promises a peace that the world cannot give. What does He mean? That brings us to the text of today’s sermon: “**The Spirit of Christ Is the Spirit of Peace.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

1) Worldly Peace

2) Jesus’ Peace; and,

3) Peace In All Circumstances

1) Worldly Peace. Jesus told His disciples, and us, that He was giving them a kind of peace that the world could not give. Thus, we should first look at the ideas of peace which common in the world.

When the cold war between the United States and the former Soviet Union and their respective allies ended, many thought about a new world order in which the former super powers would establish peace through commercial prosperity. Some even spoke about the so-called “end of history.”

Some of you may chuckle. Is there peace? Well, no. There are wars in the Middle East and hot spots and conflicts in Asia, Africa, South America – you name it.

What is common to the world’s definition of peace is that it is established and maintained through the force of arms. It is brought

about by the strength of human beings.

The ancients knew of this kind of peace. In the Roman world of Jesus' day the world of Rome was at peace. They called it the *Pax Romana*, or, the Peace of Rome. Rome had tamed the highways and sea lanes of the empire so that people could travel in peace. This peace was enforced through the sword, and anyone who knows history knows that Roman justice was relatively just, always swift, and always brutal.

But as anyone also knows, because this peace was enforced by the power of the sword, it did not last. The Roman empire crumbled through the advance of Germanic and Turkic tribes.

Even domestic peace is enforced by the power of the state. We have police forces because there are indeed criminals out there. Laws upon laws are multiplied. Increases in police are called for. We call for harsher punishments and longer sentences. Do we have peace?

On a personal level, do we have peace? As I've said, Eastern philosophies call for a renunciation of the world, declaring the world to be an illusion. But even the practitioners of this find that the world is not an illusion and there is no peace.

Or perhaps we have in mind Rudyard Kipling's poem, "If" – If you can keep your mind when all about are losing theirs. The idea is to possess a kind of stoic inner calm. Some wag has altered the poem slightly to say – "If you can keep you mind when all about are losing theirs, you're probably on Prozac." Well, anti-depressants are a help, but they are not a cure for anxiety.

So *in* all thins, what we have is a quest for external and inner peace that ends in futility.

Why is that? Why the futility?

2) Jesus' Peace. This bring us to the peace that Jesus gives. What is this peace of which Jesus speaks?

Paul puts it well in Romans 5,1 –

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

True peace therefore is (1) God's doing and (2) has been brought about by Jesus Himself.

First, we'll speak about it being God's doing.

In war, in domestic disputes, in any conflict, people always want to know, "Who's to blame?" When we figure out who's to blame, then a proper punishment can be assigned and the more innocent party can feel good.

Well, when we, by ourselves, apart from Jesus, stand before the judgment seat of God, and all our actions are replayed in slo-mo, instant replay, and not only all our actions, but all our thoughts as well, also all the things we haven't done as well as all the things we have done, for good or bad, we find that none of us is right before God.

What does that mean? It means that apart from Jesus none of us have any right to stand before God on the basis of what we have done. We have all gone astray, some more than others, and all have fallen short of what God requires, *in* either loving Him or loving our neighbor.

But God has provided a substitute for our inadequacies, our sins. That substitute is Jesus. And by His perfect life and substitutionary death, He paid the price for our sins. It is only on the basis of what Jesus has done for us, His atoning death, that we can stand before God.

Thus, our being justified means that peace has been made between

us and God. It is not on our doings or the doings any person, but the doing of Jesus Himself.

Jesus is, as Paul said, our Peace, He is the bridge between us and God.

3) Peace In All Circumstances. Thus in a world beset by conflict, both within and without, we can have Peace in any situation because Jesus is by our side. Jesus is there in spite of any internal or external conflict.

That is what Pentecost is all about. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to enlighten each of us through His gifts, one of which is peace.

He is the Spirit Who works faith in us, faith in what Christ has done for us, faith in the fact that God declares us forgiven, declares that there is peace between each of us and Him. That's why Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit.

What does this Peace mean?

In the midst of a troubled world, we know that God is with us.

We are forgiven. We have God's name. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit given to us at our Baptism. This is the name of forgiveness.

We stand forgiven in the midst of a world caught up in conflict and sin. As a matter of fact, the default setting for the world is sin and its consequence – conflict.

And it is only through this forgiveness that peace comes. This is the wholeness that declares that we have been adopted as brothers and sisters of our Elder Brother, Jesus. He it is Who has gathered us, so that we might in turn be gatherers. Working that peace in our lives and to others.

To cling to Him Who is our Peace is to find peace. To forgive, is to share peace.

Conclusion: Will we ever have peace in this world? Should we ever stop working for peace? No, and no again.

We realize we live in a world of conflict. Even God realizes that the sword of order has been given to government to maintain peace — civic order. We should never forget that.

But we realize that real and lasting peace comes not through the absence of troubles, but with the realization that Jesus is with us.

In the midst of a troubled world, we have the picture of Jesus as a mother hen who would gather her chicks. In His bosom we find peace that the world cannot give. Not made with human hands, but sustained by the wounds of Jesus' hands, Who bought our peace with God. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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