

“Peace Be with You” - John 20:19-21

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

The text for meditation for this second Sunday of Easter is from the Gospel of St. John 20, which I read before. This Gospel speaks about the doubting Thomas. It is the traditional Holy Gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter.

The Gospel text says that Jesus bestowed the authority to forgive sins upon the Disciples, as Ministers of His Church. Jesus says “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And He breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But on this Second Sunday of Easter my sermon is about the greeting of Jesus to the disciples after His resurrection. They were behind locked doors, He said to the Disciples: “Peace be with you.”

Dear Friends in Christ: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! What a wonderful declaration that is! Jesus lives, and because He lives we can be sure that our God will forgive the sins of those who repent, and will give life and salvation to those who trust in Him. And for those who do not repent their sins are withheld.

Jesus lives, and that means that the power that sin, death and the devil had over us is destroyed forever. Jesus lives, and in His life we have the sure and living hope that God will be with us to help us, to bless us and to strengthen us as we struggle through the cares and worries of our life. He will be with us in all things to see us through, and to give us the victory that is ours in Christ.

Day by day, we can be sure that the world is different, that our lives are different because of the Resurrection. Jesus lives! And so we gather today as we do every Sunday to remember, to rejoice and to celebrate the life that is ours through the death and the glorious resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All the Scripture lessons for Easter remind us of the blessings that are ours through the life-changing power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And one of the greatest of the blessings that are ours in the Risen Christ comes through the simple greeting that the resurrected Lord shares with His disciples as He appears to them and says, “**Peace be with you.**”

We pray for peace in the world, peace in our hearts, peace in our homes and our country. To us, peace means the absence of war, the end of all the killing and terror. But as you are aware there is no peace in the world. There are wars and international conflicts in many nations. Right now there is war in Ukraine. There is also terrorism insurgency in Congo, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria, Ethiopia. And peoples are dying in those countries and most are civilians because the battles are fought in the cities.

In recent decades wars have become increasingly deadly for civilians. Between 1990 and 2000, civilians accounted for 90 percent of the world's four million war-related deaths.

Yes, there is no peace during wars. There is no peace in the families either. There are divorce/separation, blending families, financial problems, stress, alcohol or drug use, gambling problems, the onset of mental health problems, lack of trust/respect in a relationship, etc. These issues are real; sadly, they occurred in Christian families and even in the church. While some situations are resolved over time, others can go on for months, even years.

When Jesus says to His disciples, ***peace be with you*** He bestows on them the peace that has been the purpose of His entire life, death and resurrection. Remember how, when Jesus was born, the angels filled the skies around Bethlehem with a wonderful hymn, "***Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth***" Jesus came to bring peace, the peace between God and man that is lost because of our sin. By giving Himself in our place upon the cross, Jesus has brought the forgiveness that we need because of our sinfulness; the forgiveness that is necessary if we are to be at peace with God.

St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14 "***For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, and Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** If Jesus had not died for us on the cross, then there could be no peace for us. God would still be separated from us because of our sin, leaving us with nothing to look forward to in the future except the punishment of eternal death—which we truly deserve because of our sin. But Christ died for us, and in our text we see the resurrected Christ standing before His disciples and saying, not once, but twice in one Sunday and then saying it again the following Sunday: ***Peace be with you.*** And we are told that ***the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*** They knew, they felt the peace which only the Living Lord can bring to the hearts and lives of His people.

And how we need that peace each and every day! It is very sad of all the things that are

happening in the world in particular when the glory of Easter shines so brightly for us! Although Christ has won the victory over us, we can see that the devil still fights on, doing his best to destroy the peace that is ours in Christ by first destroying peace in our lives.

Read the newspaper, or go online and you can read all about the events taking place in the world. It is sad. There is no peace. Very often, as we gathered in worship, we could hear the sirens of the fire trucks and the ambulance as they sped by our church. Those sirens are a reminder of how fleeting the peace of this world, of our lives really is.

There are those among us who have had to deal with bad news related to deaths, sickness, separations, job changes and other problems. The congregation is also divided and also has other conflicts. The devil uses all of these things to rob us of the peace that God wants us to enjoy.

These things—and countless others like them, bring fear, worry and uncertainty into our lives. They start to make us wonder, “Where is the peace that you spoke of Lord?” If you have given us peace, why do things seem so unsettled in our lives? And if that is not enough, it still seems that, in spite of the resurrection, we have all the same problems that we deal with each day.

Yes, Jesus rose from the dead, but we still see struggles between husband and wife, between parent and child, between members in our congregation. Then where is the peace that Jesus gives?

We still have our own doubts and uncertainties about our jobs, our future, our well-being. Where is the peace? We still have the pains and illness we had before Easter. And our society is still filled with violence and terrorism, immorality, crime and corruption. Where is the peace?

The prophet Isaiah once wrote: ***You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you*** (Isaiah 26:3). The peace which Jesus gives is that perfect peace, the peace which, St Paul reminds us, ***transcends all understanding***.

Before Easter, before His crucifixion, Jesus had told the disciples: ***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives***. John 14:27. Jesus did not promise the kind of peace that made everything wonderful in this world. In fact, Jesus had warned his followers that they would not have a peaceful life here in the world. You will be hated and persecuted because of me, Jesus told them. Your lives will be difficult because you are my

followers. And then He told them: ***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”***
John 16:33

Peace be with you, Jesus said to His disciples. And they knew the peace that passes understanding. Even when they were arrested and threatened with greater punishments because of their preaching, they had the peace in their hearts. They had His peace upon them, and not the Sanhedrin, not the world, not even the devil could take that peace away from them. The Risen Lord gives that same perfect peace to you and to me.

The reason we have no peace in the world is sin. Sin creates a condition of animosity by people toward God. Because of sin, natural humanity is afraid of God, feels distant from God, and wants nothing to do with God. Because of sin, there is conflict with God.

Jesus came to take sin away. He was charged with our sin, and He died on the cross, taking the punishment that we deserve, so that now, the price of sin has been paid by Christ. We, therefore, are reconciled. That dividing wall of sin has been destroyed through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Since we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure that He will, as He has said, keep us in perfect peace at all times. Even when the fiercest storms are raging above, there is peace and calm in the depths of the ocean. And that is the peace that Jesus brings - the inner peace and tranquillity that is undisturbed by the storms and agitation of our life. In those very moments when the devil works so hard to rob us of our peace, the Living Lord comforts us with the Spirit, who brings us His peace, the peace that passes understanding.

Friends, worldly peace, relational peace, family peace, is not the greatest peace that can be attained. Jesus came into this world so that there could be peace with God. This is the message for those battered by threats to their lives or threats to their friendships. This is the message for those worn by international hostilities or inter-family strife. This is the message for those torn by danger to their well-being or conflicts between loved ones.

Friends, in those dark moments of doubt and fear, we have peace because Jesus has overcome the world and has won the ultimate victory. Amen

Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.