

Peace (Low Sunday)

“And when [Jesus] drew near and saw [Jerusalem] He wept over it, saying, ‘Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!’” (Lk 19:41,42)

You recognize these words from Our Lord, seemingly spoken with the very disposition He urges against: an unpeaceful heart. He offered them during the events we commemorated at the start of Holy Week on Palm Sunday: His entrance into Jerusalem. His tears reflect the turmoil in His heart: the Good News has been rejected. His love will go unrequited. Man prefers dark to light, sin to charity, himself to God...chaos to peace. And so, God cries for us.

The generosity of Christ, the length He will go to foster our trust and love, has reached its fullest expression: the giving of His Body and Blood at the Last Supper *and* at Calvary, a gift and sacrifice to be shared with God’s people until the end of time through the grace of Holy Orders. During His farewell discourse in the Upper Room, Jesus spoke of *peace*...indeed, He made a divine promise: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (Jn 14:27) And a little later: “I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33)

And in today’s Gospel, we find the fulfillment of another divine promise: the Savior has risen from the dead as He said He would, and His first word to disciples, very likely back in the same Upper Room, was *peace*: “Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:21)

Among the things the human heart cannot help but desire is peace. For those with a supernatural perspective, this can be no surprise. God is not just the God of peace, *He is peace* in Himself, and we are created in His image and likeness. And so, peace was to be our natural state. A definition might help here, because peace is not just the absence of trouble or sorrow or pain, anymore that justice is simply the absence of injustice. There is substance to both, a positive content. Peace, said St Augustine, is the “tranquility of order”...and order implies that some things are more important than others. Everything cannot be of the same priority, or that word has no meaning. And so, while life in this world is a great gift, it is surpassed by the gift of life in the world to come. Thus, earthly life is ordered to eternal life.

I think Augustine’s insight into the character of peace—the tranquility that comes from maintaining order, and that some things are of necessity more important than others—gives us an indispensable sign of how to preserve peace, and reveals an important reason why we lose it.

The biggest enemy of peace, of course, is sin, the ultimate disorder. Sin is selfishness, which means I choose myself before God or before you...an upheaval in the order of charity. And sin came into the world—and disfigured the peace that God had given to our first parents—because Adam and Eve followed a path of doubt, distrust and disobedience. Another voice suggested that God was not good, and that he—the one whom Jesus once called “a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44)—would be a better provider. Man doubted the abundant evidence before his eyes, and his subsequent distrust ended in disobedience...and finally in misery. To preserve peace, a wise confessor once told me that the only thing we should “fear” is displeasing God, and this we can prevent by trusting Him and avoiding sin.

"Let nothing disturb thee; Let nothing dismay thee; All things pass; God never changes. Patience attains all that it strives for. He who has God finds he lacks nothing: God alone suffices." These are the well-known words of St Teresa of Avila, and I commend them to you as meditation from a great saint who was no stranger to suffering and sacrifice.

Please allow me to try to recast her encouragement and admonition: nothing is outside of God's providence...to include the gravest injustice: the death of the Father's Son at the hands of men. The why or reason for certain events in this world may not be clear to us, but a lack of understanding is, for Christ's disciples, not incompatible with trust and love. We have a good and provident and merciful Father in Heaven who is arranging all things so that we might join Him...in Heaven, in eternity. He is always at work, as St Paul says, "for good with those who love him, who are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28) Nothing escapes the Father's "serene and kindly countenance." Nothing is beyond His grace. If we hold to these things, yes, there will still be pain in a fallen world. But underneath, peace will guard the soul.

The providence of a good and faithful Father is, like Our Lady who trusted and loved Him best of all, the *cause of our joy*, of Easter joy. The Father's Son is truly risen! More gracious words from St Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:4-7)

Trust, patience, forbearance, gratitude...all virtues we see and to which we are drawn in Jesus Christ, and that can, through the grace of the Paschal Mystery, be ours...today.

This is Augustine's indispensable insight: Everything depends on our keeping things in the right order. Calvary is the narrow path to the joy of the Risen Christ. Eternity is the context for the here and now. This life, said the great Fr Edward Leen, is a novitiate for Heaven...70 years or 80 for those who are strong, as the psalmist says...we are all novices in the school of divine love. It is important to do good, but it is much more important *to be good*...something that takes time and grace. I can do generous things, for instance, but that is not quite the same as being generous, as being Christlike. So, the school of divine love requires purification, but never pain or suffering without purpose. In the light of the Resurrection, we still remember the tears of Jesus, who cried because His gift of peace was spurned...tears to which we do not wish to add. But we do find strength and solace in the One who cried and who stayed the course.

Our Lord is the God who not only suffers for us, but with us. "Et Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis." (Jn 1:14) He has promised us the peace the world cannot give or take. And He has proven Himself trustworthy.