

Third Sunday of Easter B - The Peace of the Resurrected Christ Is What We Need

April 14, 2024.

Jesus' favourite word after his resurrection is "peace." It is almost always the first word on his lips when he appears to his apostles, as in the passage we just listened to: "Peace be with you." Every time we celebrate Mass, we hear these same words right before we receive the living, resurrected body and blood of our Lord in Holy Communion: "Lord Jesus Christ," the priest says, "you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you." He didn't give this peace before his resurrection, but afterwards he does give it, and he gives it because we need it. Christ's peace cures diseases of modern, secular society: stress, depression, and anxiety. We have all been affected by those diseases. As our friendship with the resurrected Lord grows deeper, we are gradually healed of those diseases, because he brings us his three-fold peace. First, peace for our mind. When we look at his wounds, which he still bears in his glorified body, we know for certain that his forgiveness is everlasting; once he forgives our sins, we are truly forgiven; our conscience can be at rest. Second, peace for our heart. When we see the spike marks in his hands and feet, we know for certain that we are loved with an undying, unconditional, personal, determined love - Christ's love. Third, peace for our soul. Christ is alive, and he is ruling and expanding an everlasting Kingdom, and he has invited each one of us to help him do that by building up the Church. We have work to do that matters, that is worthwhile, that will satisfy our thirst for meaning. The peace of the resurrected Christ is what we really need. The Psalmist put it well: "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety".

Christ's resurrection enables us to grow in this triple peace because in the middle of this stormy, turbulent world, it gives us a firm anchor: our hope for life everlasting. We renew this hope every Sunday, when we pray the Creed. This has been exemplified through the centuries by the saints, and in a special way by the martyrs. St Ammon and his four companions were martyred back in the third century. They were Roman soldiers at the service of the Roman governor of the great city of Alexandria, in Egypt. Their martyrdom happened during the wave of persecution started by the emperor Decius, who forced all Christians to worship Roman gods under pain of death. Ammon and his companions, who were secretly Christians themselves, were on duty during a trial of prisoners accused of being Christians. The judge's interrogation was harsh and intimidating, and at least one poor Christian seemed to be wavering. The five soldiers saw what was happening and were afraid that their brother in Christ was going to deny his faith, thus putting at risk his eternal salvation. So they began to make encouraging signs to him, gesturing, nodding, bulging their eyes - anything they could do without putting themselves into too much danger. But their efforts were so energetic that the judge couldn't help but noticed. And when he inquired as to what was going on, the five soldiers broke ranks and declared themselves Christians. This disturbed the Roman officials but it also renewed the courage of the prisoners. In the end, both the prisoners and the Christian soldiers stayed faithful to Christ, suffering martyrdom instead of denying their Lord. The persecution didn't steal their interior peace because their anchor was firmly attached to the risen Lord.

Two weeks ago, we watched a movie on YouTube about Father Rupert Mayer. Father Rupert Mayer was a German Jesuit priest and a leading figure of the Catholic resistance to Nazism in Munich. In May 1937, the Gestapo ordered Mayer to stop speaking in public which he obeyed, but he continued to preach in church. Mayer has been arrested several times and was put in prisons.

In one of the scenes while in concentration camp, one of the prisoners asked him to preach to them. Instead of talking, he played a Jewish popular tune on his violin and led the other prisoners to dance with joy and peace. While the Nazi soldiers tried to stop him and sent him to another prison, one of the prisoners followed them to the door to thank him and was shot. Father Rupert Mayer died few months after the end of the war. In 1987, he was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Munich. His feast day is November 3. I highly recommend watching this movie. (https://youtu.be/C9fB0SjrAIE?si=zj8_o7W8DCMy2KbJ)

We don't have to be martyred. One reason only Christ can give us the peace we long for is because only Christ can offer us a friendship that is solid and everlasting. Everything else in the world is passing and limited - even good, faithful relationships are vulnerable, because sickness and death can snatch them away from us. St Marcellus, the Righteous figured this out at a fairly young age. He lived in the fifth century and came from an aristocratic family in the Middle East. He received a top-notch education and had a very bright future. He was left

with a large fortune when his parents died. He had to make a decision about what to do with it. His friends and relatives told him to just enjoy it. But Marcellus wasn't so sure, and so he went on a personal retreat to think, pray, study the faith, and seek God's will. Gradually, he became convinced of the passing nature of what most people ardently desire in life. He considered the following analogy: Little kids make a big deal out of their toys, but adults make a big deal out of money, success, and pleasure instead. However, Marcellus reasoned, what do such things look like from God's perspective, if not foolish toys. And so, in pursuit of lasting values, he moved to Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) and put himself under the direction of some well-known Christians. He grew in holiness and wisdom, and eventually felt called to the monastic life. Soon, Marcellus was named abbot of a gigantic monastery near Constantinople (modern Istanbul). It flourished exceedingly under his leadership, and he became a valued adviser to Church councils, bishops, and emperors. St Marcellus found and spread the peace of Christ, because he built his life on the one and only solid foundation.

We all want to experience this peace more deeply - peace of mind, heart, and soul.

And Christ wants the same for us - that's why he suffered, died, and rose. But if that's so, why do we still find ourselves so easily overrun by stress, anxiety, and discouragement? Many obstacles can inhibit the flow of Christ's peace in our lives. The most obvious one is sin. St John puts it clearly in this Sunday's Second Reading: "Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist." Sometimes we fall into sin out of weakness. Those falls are easy to confess and repent of. But other times we allow subtle habits of sin to take root in our lives. For example, we refuse to accept some part of Church teaching on faith or morals - like Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, abortion, or gay marriage. Sure, we find plenty of reasons to justify this resistance - all the arguments we hear on the news, for instance. But at heart, to reject official Church teaching on these issues (which we find in the Catechism), is to reject Christ's saving truth. It's like telling God that we trust him a little bit in some things, but we trust CBC more in other things. Subtle habits of sin can also take other forms: like slacking off in our life responsibilities - just doing enough to get by, but not really giving our best; or wasting inordinate amounts of time on hobbies, entertainment, gossips or the internet. Sinful habits can also take not-so-subtle forms, as financial corruption and pornography statistics make clear. In this Easter season, we have to remind ourselves that resurrection must take place here and now in our life. We never know what true life means until we live in the footsteps of Jesus. We cannot achieve it overnight but it is a gradual transformation that takes place within us as we turn away from deeds of darkness and live for God. Gradually we come to view the world, not with our own eyes but with a Christlike gaze. At the recent solar eclipse, people around the globe were in awe and wonder as they watched the sun's return after total darkness cover some part of the earth. Hopefully many of us will also experience wonder and awe as we experience the joy of Jesus' resurrection that wipes away the darkness of our fear and despair and brings us to the brightness of God's glory in eternal life. If we are not experiencing the peace of Christ's resurrected life a little bit more each season, maybe we need to do some spring cleaning in our souls. For that, the best disinfectant is confession. By doing that we renew our hope in him, and ask for the grace to receive - and keep - his peace.