

April 8, 2018 A Peace the World Cannot Give Homily: Brothers and sisters, I am of an age to remember the countercultural movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's. It was a time of massive civil unrest and war. The conflict in Vietnam was at fever pitch. The so-called "hippie" movement was widely covered by the media and was treated sympathetically. A two-fingered hand gesture was adopted by the nation's rebellious youth as a symbol of peace. Even the youth's most sinister figure of the era, President Richard Nixon, adopted the peace sign as a symbol of victory. The anthem of that bygone generation may have been John Lennon's song, "Give Peace A Chance". It turned out to be a hollow gesture. The troubles plaguing the generation of fifty years ago continue to menace us today. War and civil unrest have not disappeared. Peace cannot be imposed from without, but only from within, within the human heart.

On the evening of Our Lord's Resurrection, a frightened community of disciples is behind locked doors. Unexpectedly, the Risen Christ appears to them. No fewer than three times he says to his disciples, "peace", a traditional Jewish greeting conveying a sense of well-being and security. But it is noteworthy that the peace Christ offers his disciples is more than a standard greeting; it is a gift. On the night before his death, Jesus spoke the following words to his disciples at the Last Supper: "Peace I leave with you. MY peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid". (Jn14:27)

With his gift of peace, the disciple of Jesus can carry out the work Jesus assigns to him without fear. They can face persecution sustained by the grace of the Risen Christ. Contrasting the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles and the gospel reading from John may be of help here. John writes, "On the evening of the first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were for fear of the Jews...." (Jn.20:19) whereas St. Luke writes, "With great power they bore witness to the Resurrection of the Lord and great favor was accorded them all". (Acts 4:33)

Christ's peace is a living sign of his mercy. Bear in mind that the Risen Christ does not scold his disciples the first time He appears to them after He dies on the cross. One does not hear a reprimand. "Why did you abandon me? Why did you run away from me like cowards?" No! He offers them the gift of his peace. And there is peace wherever one is undeservedly pardoned.

In his reflections on today's gospel, the retired Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI writes, "Peace is the fruit of the love that led Jesus to die on the cross, to pour out his blood for us. Christ is our peace, declares St Paul."

Have we experienced Jesus' gift of peace? Wishing a person the peace of Christ is a lovely, meaningful gesture in a time of violence, hatred and terror!

At the end of mass, the priest commissions the faithful to "go forth in peace". It is a solemn reminder that all of the baptized are obliged to bear witness to the peace of Christ.

May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts!

Amen!