

“Peace be with you.” We hear Jesus say these words in today’s Gospel. They’re becoming a common refrain. We heard Jesus say these exact same words three times in last weekend’s Gospel. “Peace be with you.” The disciples needed to hear these words. They were desperate for peace in their lives.

Imagine how they felt. A mere few weeks earlier they had accompanied their long-awaited Messiah into Jerusalem in the hopes of overthrowing the oppressive Roman government. But instead, they watched as Jesus was arrested, tried, scourged, and crucified. They watched from a distance as their hopes and dreams died hanging on a cross atop Calvary. Their last image of their Messiah was His dead body being laid inside a tomb. The thud of the stone rolling into place to seal the tomb must have been deafening to them. It was the sound of their hearts breaking.

There was no peace to be found for them. They felt abandoned and betrayed. They had put all their faith and trust in this man and now He was dead. And to add insult to injury, the leaders of this Jesus movement were nowhere to be found. They had fled and were in hiding for fear of their lives. For all they knew, they were going to suffer the same gruesome fate as Jesus. The disciples definitely needed reassurance from God that He was in control.

We could use some of that same reassurance right now too. Just look in the news. There are plenty of reasons to not be at peace. The world is filled with wars and hatreds and conflicts. People are killing each other at an alarming rate. People are going unfed, unclothed, and unloved. Being a Christian is more unpopular in our culture with every passing day. We’re surrounded by people that don’t want a Savior. They would rather worship gods of money, pleasure, and sex.

Closer to home, there are moments in our lives when things seem to be spinning out of control. There are times we too feel abandoned and betrayed. We question where God is in our lives. We're faced with illness and sickness. We have anxiety over our jobs, our finances, our children, or our marriages. We wonder where God is leading us. We second-guess what God is calling us to do with our lives. We're desperate for peace in our lives.

Now, the peace I'm talking about is not the peace we find sitting on the beach listening to the waves crash on the shore, or sitting alone looking up at the stars on a quiet night, or in our favorite fishing hole, or watching our kids play in the yard. These types of peace are fleeting. I'm talking about an enduring peace that lasts forever. A peace that is inexhaustible. A peace that is insurmountable - the only peace that can calm our inner restlessness. As Saint Augustine said, "Our heart is restless until it rests in the Lord."

All this makes me think of a hurricane. The cyclonic winds of the storm exceed 74 miles per hour. Rain, thunder, and lightning usually accompany the winds. Hurricanes can be very fierce storms with relentless pounding winds that continue hour after hour. But a very fascinating thing about a hurricane is the "eye" - a place of perfect calm in its center. Though the winds blow and rage all around it, there are none in the eye. So it is with us in the storms of life. With the Lord as our center, there is calm and peace, even in the darkest of life's storms.

Putting the Lord at the center of our lives can be hard to do. Sometimes it seems almost ridiculous to expect to be at peace. But that's exactly what Jesus wants for us. And when we find that peace, it's the calmness and stillness at the very core of our being that we yearn for. Christian peace is what we should all strive for. In my own experience, I've found that the more I follow God's call in my life, the more at peace I am. When I chase my own desires and follow paths that are not necessarily from God, that's when I find anxiety and stress mounting in my

life. That's when the winds of unrest blow and blow. But when I identify the movement of the Holy Spirit, I find the calm in the midst of the storm. That's when I encounter God's peace about the matter.

But as Christians, we hear the word 'peace' a lot. 'Peace' is part of our Christian vocabulary. We use it so often that we can lose sight of its importance. We stop reflecting on what it actually means. Think about how many times we hear 'peace' just during the Mass. In the *Gloria*, we sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people of goodwill." In the prayers after the Our Father, Father Jacek will pray "Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day." Shortly after, I will invite all of us to offer each other the sign of peace. Then at the end of singing the *Lamb of God*, we will sing "dona nobis pacem"; which is Latin for "grant us peace." And at the end of Mass, I will dismiss everyone by saying, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." That's 5 examples of 'peace' and it's not even all of them.

True Christian peace is recognizing that God is in control and that Jesus has risen from the dead just as He said he would. The disciples in our Gospel had a hard time doing this. They doubted that He was truly risen. Even when they do recognize Jesus, they think He may be just a ghost. They're afraid that they're encountering the dead not the living. For them, believing He was a ghost was more comprehensible than believing He was risen. Jesus proved to them that He was not a ghost by having them put their hands on Him and eat fish with Him. He was truly alive and real.

Part of our walk as Christians is learning to have faith and trust in the Lord who is wiser than we are and can see the long range view. We can only see what is in front of us. We see from an earthly perspective; which can at times make us feel insecure, frustrated, and fearful. Christian peace comes from seeing the world from a heavenly perspective. God has the long

range view of things. He knows how all the pieces fit together. In the grand scheme of things, Christ as the final Judge, will settle all differences with fairness and bring to pass all that is necessary and equitable. Justice will prevail. Suffering a wrong in this life or an earthly loss pales in comparison to eternity.

Just like for the disciples, He is truly alive and real for us today. The Easter accounts in the Gospels are not crazy fictions concocted by overzealous disciples who somehow stole Jesus' body out of the tomb. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a reality, a reality in which all of the Scriptures find their ultimate fulfillment. Jesus' resurrection is a historical fact. It's as relevant today as it was almost 2,000 years ago. The disciples experienced firsthand the Risen Christ in their presence. So do we. We experience firsthand the Risen Christ in each other and especially in the Eucharist when we physically touch Him and eat and drink of the Body and Blood of Christ.

Our Lord is Risen! We should be at peace because our destiny is tied to His. Jesus' bodily resurrection is the same resurrection that we will experience. We'll be raised body and soul to a new life that's not immediately recognizable to our friends and loved ones. Like Jesus, our wounds and blemishes will be apparent, yet they won't scar or cause pain. We'll be given an opportunity to be in His presence for all of eternity. There is something greater than the here and now. Our true home is not here. Our true home is in heaven with God.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus' greeting "Peace be with you" is a challenge to us to live the Christian peace. The last words of today's Gospel are, "You are witnesses of these things." We are called to be witnesses of the peace that the Risen Lord brings. Our world is in desperate need of a message of peace. As Christians, we should be the very presence of peace in our neighborhoods, in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, and in our streets. We're called

to share our peace with others. It's easy to shake hands with the person worshipping next to us here at Mass. But, are we willing to share our peace with that person outside these doors, whom we find so difficult to love?