

Theme: The Risen Lord has given us a truthful peace

Text: John 20:19-20

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The sermon text for this morning is a portion of the Gospel Reading for today. The event takes place in the evening of that first Easter Sunday. Please listen to John 20:19-20 “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” This is the Word of the Lord our God.

Let us pray: O Lord, our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter, as we come together to hear Your Word, we humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

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The four Gospels of the Scriptures say that Jesus Christ after His resurrection appeared to the Apostles and disciples. No doubt, Jesus wanted to give them plenty of evidence about His resurrection; He wanted to strengthen their faith, and that they witness to others about His glorious resurrection. And our Lord, before ascending to heaven, would remain with His disciples forty days.

The gospel of Luke 24: 21 give us an idea about the mood of these disciples after Jesus resurrection. In this biblical passage Jesus appeared to two disciples going to Emmaus. The disciples said to Him, not knowing who He was: “we had hoped that He was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.” Without doubt these disciples to whom the Lord appeared in the road to Emmaus were disappointed, and full of fear. Jesus, as well, appeared to the apostles who were in a room. And He went through the wall in an inexplicable way, and stood among them. Neither the locked doors, nor thick walls kept our Lord to bring this news to His friends as He once called them. How did He do that? How did He get inside that place when the doors were locked?

"Well," says human reason, "He used misdirection with a slight of hand in a sort of 'reverse Houdini' trick." No, that's not what happened. The Bible says it simply, “Jesus came and stood among them.” “Well," says the superstitious, "It was a ghost!" No, that's not the way it was. The Bible indicates that, Jesus showed them His hands and His side. "Well," says the science fiction fanatic, "Jesus was beamed down." No, it was not this way either. The Holy Bible indicates simply that “Jesus came and stood among them.”

Our minds cannot comprehend how this happens. But even if unknown to us, it is nevertheless true and we should be thankful for Christ's presence. So before Jesus ascended into heaven, He was not speaking figuratively, but quite literally when He said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Therefore, be comforted with the truths that this Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, is your High Priest Who, at every moment of your life, is at the right hand of God interceding for you (Romans 8:34 & Hebrews 7:25); that as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

That you and I have been allowed into the presence of the Lord as we gather in His Name to hear the Word; that we receive Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar; and that this Jesus Who has gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:3), is also with us always to the end of our days upon this earth.

The text does not tell us what the disciples were thinking or talking before Jesus stood among them but we have certain idea how they were feeling. They were afraid and in disbelief at everything that the Lord had foretold and said to them. All, except John, had disappeared from the scene during the days of the passion and death of Christ. Peter, the brave Peter, denied him three times. The disciples were so afraid that they thought that what happened to Jesus might also happen to them, and they went into hiding and locked the doors behind them. They had forgotten the words of the Saviour about Himself in numerous occasions. But, we cannot be harshly with the apostles and disciples of that time. We, too, have doubts from time to time.

But Jesus says "Peace be with you." The peace which the resurrected Christ imparted to His apostles was not the placid and serene life; neither was it the absence of conflict. The story of the early church reveals just the opposite. Rather, the peace of God is an inner sense of well-being; it is the deep conviction that everything is right between God and me, that everything is OK, that my life is in order and in God's hands, no matter what.

There is a story about a little boy with a terminal illness. So one day he asked his mother, "Mom, what is it like to die? Will it hurt?" As the mother pull herself together - she searched for an answer her child could relate to. "Charlie," she said, "do you remember when you used to play with your friends all day? You'd be so tired that when we would sit around and watch TV after supper, you would fall asleep on the sofa with your clothes on. Well, that was not where you belonged. But in the morning, you always woke up where you did belong—in your own bed in your own room. Dad had carried you up the stairs, into your room, and tucked you into your own bed where you belonged. "Charlie," she continued, "I think that is what death is like. It is like waking up some morning and finding ourselves in another room—in the place where we belong—safe in the strong, loving arms of Jesus."

My dear friends in Christ; that is the peace that the Risen Christ imparts to His people—the knowledge, the conviction, the comfort, the confidence that we belong to Him, that no matter what happens in this life, on this earth, we belong to God. So the greeting that Jesus gives to His disciples "Peace be with you" has a profound meaning for believers of all time. This peace that Jesus gives us is not the peace that the world gives. No, the peace that Jesus is talking about is the restoration of the broken relation between the Creator and His creatures.

For that Jesus had to incarnate and born as one of us, and lived in obedience to the law. For that He suffered, died on a cross, and rose from the death. Now, the disciples of all time have a truthful peace with our Father in heaven. Now, the thunder and fury of the Mount Sinai has been silenced forever. Our redemption has been completed by Christ, and it is accepted by the Father in heaven. Our absolution is a reality. Now neither the devil nor our hearts, nor the world cannot convince us that God does not loves us; that God rejects us; that God is not our loving Father; that God seeks to destroy us. At the cross all our enemies have been defeated and the proof of that absolute defeat is the empty tomb.

There is no more a struggle between the Creator and mankind. The debt has been paid. There is no enmity between God and us. The creation which was broken by the sin of Adam and Eve has been restored by the death of the second Adam, the Man-God: Jesus Christ.

The fearful and unbelieving disciples cannot believe what they see and the Lord had to show them His hands and His side. When they are convinced that they are not seeing a ghost

their faces turn from sadness to happiness. They see that it is the same body that was nailed to the cross. The Lord repeats His greeting to the disciples "Peace be with you" as an introduction to the commission that He will give them, as His messengers; His ambassadors. The Father in heaven had sent Jesus, and now, Jesus sends them and us to spread the Gospel; the message of the Resurrection; the forgiveness of sins to all people. Jesus breathed on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. That power of the Spirit is given to all Christians, and it is contained in the Word in any form: oral, written, or sacramental.

Jesus conveys the power of the keys, the key that opens: the good news, and the key which closes: the Law of God. Christians are carriers and transmitters of the inherent power of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God. This is the essential mission of the church: to execute the Office of the Keys and this is the moment when our Lord instituted it. The forgiveness of sins that Jesus bought to us with His suffering and death must be spread among the people by preaching the Gospel, privately and publicly, individually or among multitudes.

The Gospel is not only good news about the salvation that Jesus purchased for us but it is the practical application of this message. That is absolution; the forgiveness of sins; the exercise of the Office of the Keys. The person who does not accept this absolution exclude himself or herself from the grace of God, and their sins are withheld. This power and authority is given to all believers, to the congregation that proclaims the Gospel. Pastors exercise this authority in the name of God and by delegation of the congregation.

My fellow redeemed; the resurrection of our Lord make a difference for us as it did for the apostles and disciples. We can go through life as they did –knowing the presence of the resurrected Christ, living His peace, plunging into life with purpose and power, with the same reckless abandon, afraid of nothing, secure in the knowledge that we belong to the resurrected one, to the one who has power even over death.

Life can be different. And we can know this resurrection difference, too, just as the apostle and disciples did, and just as Thomas finally did, when, in spite of his reluctance and scepticism, he took the risk of faith—when he fell down on his knees and blurted out in faith, "My Lord and my God." In Jesus' Holy name. Amen.

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour". Amen