



## **From A Bishop's Journal (741)**

### **Family- and Parish-Based Catechesis on Peace (7) "Peace be with You"**

**T**he first words I usually address to you at celebrations I preside are but the greeting that Jesus extended to his disciples, the evening of his resurrection: "Peace be with you!" Even after several years as bishop, this is still the greeting I prefer, and I address it again to you today. The bishop is a sacramental sign of Christ, so it is important that I identify to him as closely as possible, and that I as your shepherd offer you the greatest gift that Jesus could give his people, the gift of peace.

#### **A Light in the Dark**

After the dramatic events they experienced on Thursday and Friday following the Passover, the Ten were together in the Upper Room, with only Thomas missing. We must not idealise what this place where the Last Supper was held and where Jesus had prayed at length: the room had turned into the refuge for frightened men shaking with fear at every sound or step they heard. They had locked the doors, and the mood inside was more than gloomy. The Master had been betrayed, judged, flogged, and crucified, and he had been quickly buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Judas, the betrayer, had returned the money received for his betrayal, and had hanged himself. Even Peter, who had sworn endless fidelity to his Master, cowardly denied him three times. All the other apostles had fled except John who welcomed and looked after the mother of Jesus. That Easter day was a quite sad affair. A sombre, hopeless day for them, except for Mary who kept the flame of her faith and hope burning. It was a joyless evening that weighed heavy on them because of their dashed hopes and the cruel remorse for their lack of courage. And suddenly, like a light in the dark, the Upper Room lit up! The door to the place where they were was locked, but Jesus stood suddenly before them, with his pierced hands and side, and he said to them, "Peace be with you!"

#### **A Memory of the Transfiguration**

Peter, James, and John, who had been privileged to witness the Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor in the company of Moses and Elijah, quickly understood what Jesus said when he told them about all the suffering he would undergo. Jesus said nothing about their cowardice and desertion, quite the contrary: He wished them peace as he alone can give it, and he sent them off as missionaries, just as he himself had been sent by the Father. "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so do I send you." And Saint John the Evangelist situates the giving of the Holy Spirit at this time, while Luke places it fifty days later. For the risen Jesus, time is of no value; he is outside

time and space, but not for the disciples who needed further signs in order to better understand what was happening. So Jesus said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound."

### **The Empty Tomb**

However, according to Saint John they had witnessed a great happening, that morning. Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb early, "while it was still dark," and she saw that the stone had been moved away. She ran to Peter and John and told them: "The Lord has been taken from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" The two disciples started out on their way to the tomb. They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. Presently, Simon came along behind him and entered the tomb. He observed the wrappings on the ground and saw the piece of cloth which had covered the head not lying with the wrappings but rolled up in place by itself. The other disciple then entered the tomb. "He saw and believed," is the Evangelist's only comment. "Until then the disciples had not understood that according to the Scriptures Jesus had to rise from the Dead."

### **Emmaus**

That same day two of the disciples were making their way to a village named Emmaus, seven miles distant from Jerusalem. They were discouraged and were discussing as they went what had happened to Jesus in whom they had placed all their hope. Without their recognising him, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them. Seeing that his disciples were discouraged, he said to them: "Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?" Beginning, then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him, the one they had so long expected.

By now the day was ending, and the two disciples invited Jesus to join them for a meal. "When he had seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, said the blessing, then broke the bread and gave it to the disciples." With that their eyes were opened and they recognised him, but Jesus vanished from their sight. Far from regretting their losing him again, they said: "Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and the rest of the company assembled. They were greeted with, "The Lord has been raised! It is true! He has appeared to Simon." The disciples recounted what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

### **May the Joy of the World Break out Everywhere!**

It is therefore not without cause that at the heart of its most solemn liturgy the Church invites the people of God to proclaim their faith and joy, at the Easter vigil: "Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus Christ, our King, is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation! Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendour, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! Darkness vanishes for ever! Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory! The risen Saviour shines upon you! Let this place resound with joy, echoing the mighty song of all God's people! This is our passover feast, when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain. This is the night when first you saved our fathers: you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea. This is the night when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin. This is the

night when Christians everywhere are restored to grace and grow together in holiness. This is the night when Jesus Christ rose triumphant from the grave. Night truly blessed, when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled with God! Father, how wonderful your care for us! How boundless your merciful love! To ransom a slave you gave away your Son. O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer! Most blessed of all nights, chosen by God to see Christ rising from the dead! Of this night Scripture says: 'The night will be as clear as day: it will become my light, my joy.' The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy. It casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride. Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth and man is reconciled with God! Therefore, heavenly Father, in the joy of this night, receive our evening sacrifice of praise, your Church's solemn offering. Accept this Easter candle, a flame divided but undimmed, a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God. Let it mingle with the lights of heaven and continue bravely burning to dispel the darkness of this night!" This is a great hymn of faith, a great hymn of joy!

### **Unceasing Liturgy**

The Church never ceases to proclaim and celebrate this great event of our faith, throughout the year. This mystery of faith is truly great! "We proclaim your death and resurrection, Lord Jesus, and we await your coming in glory." Every Eucharist proclaims Jesus' passion, his infinite love, his divine gift for peace in the world. The Liturgy of the Hours also proclaim this great mystery: "O God who brought forth the world out of chaos, you brighten our night with the knowledge of your glory. You are the image of your Father, and the splendour of His beauty. On your face, O Jesus Christ, the joy of the earth forever shines. You yourself are the light that shines in the darkness, you are a lamp unto our feet. When all else fades, you remain, when all is wiped away, you are there! The sun sets, and you shine brightly in the heart of your creation. And when the coming daybreak arrives, you shall reign in the City that knows no shadows!" Because of the communion of saints, it is such a joy to know that we are united to one another in a common praise and a common prayer!

### **Wishes of Peace**

At the end of our Lenten period, allow me to wish you all greetings of peace. May the temptation "of the flesh, of possessions and of power" never again triumph over our working for peace. May we always learn how to share our daily bread and the Word of God. Let us pick ourselves up if the road is a painful trek, and let us not fear: the transfigured Jesus can transform our daily struggles into victories of justice and truth! May springs of life everlasting burst forth in each one of you. May we look at others, at the world, and at events with the eyes of God! May we learn to believe more and more in the one who is the resurrection and the life: then we shall see the glory of God. May we never be a stumbling-block for our neighbour; rather, may we become more closely united with all those around us who suffer and are hurting. And in the name of Jesus who has chosen me to be your shepherd without any merit on my part, I say to you all: "Peace be with you!"

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