

Sermon for Quasimodo Geniti (Easter II) – John 20:19-31

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” Christ first appeared to His frightened disciples as they were together and hiding after His resurrection. It was there that He comforted them. It was there He strengthened their faith in the resurrection.

When Christ arrives, He finds them still sitting in fear and fright. Outwardly, they were afraid of those high-ranking Jewish officials and what they had done to their Lord and what they would do to them. Inwardly, their consciences accused them for abandoning their master at His most vulnerable at His last days. Their hearts were too weak and sad to believe in Him. In this grief, while they were yet troubled and talking with one another about it, Jesus suddenly appears! He gives them a friendly Hebrew-type greeting: “Shalom!” Or as we say in English: “Peace be with you.” “Peace” is when our hearts are content and cheerful. Christ’s word to His disciples creates peace and contentment.

So what does that mean for us? As Christians today, for the sake of Christ, we don’t have peace or anything good from our enemies, the devil, and the world. We daily suffer hardships and hostility. The devil terrifies us, oppresses us afflicts us with the fear of our own sin and the punishment we deserve for it. The world terrifies us with gray persecution; even our own flesh terrifies us with our weakness and vices.

Yet it’s to us Christ also speaks: “Peace be with you.” When we’re frightened and distressed: “Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.” We are content, then, that Christ is our brother and friend. In Him God has given to us everything good. Though in this world, we see no peace but only oppression.

The devil cannot bear to let a Christian have peace. So Christ gives peace in a different way than the world gives. Our Lord gives comfort to our hearts, so that inwardly He takes away our fear and fright, even though hostility and hardships remain.

Now this is what happened to Christ’s disciples as they hid in that room. They sit there locked up because of their great fear of Jesus’s enemies. They do not dare to go out. Sure death is on the other side of that door. At the moment, no one is doing anything to them. But in their minds and in their hearts they tremble; they have no peace; they have no rest. Yet in the midst of this fear and anxiety the Lord comes, soothes their hearts, and sets them at peace. Notice: Jesus doesn’t take away the danger. He simply comforts them and gives them peace in their hearts. The malice of their enemies, their plans to stamp out Christ and all His followers never left. Their anger and rage against those who would dare to preach the resurrection of Jesus, was still there. Everything remained. In His victory over death, Jesus didn’t destroy all His earthly enemies. Annas, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate, and all the other enemies who persecuted and killed Him still lived on. But Christ gave His disciples something far more powerful than the death of their enemies or the removal of their murderous threats: He gave them even greater gifts: the confidence, courage, and boldness to face anything, even death, knowing the Lord was ever present with them. “Peace be with you.”

And it’s the same for us. The only peace that can comfort our hearts is not one that comes at a time when there are no troubles and adversities present; to the contrary, it’s found in the midst of troubles, even when hardships are before our very eyes. That’s the difference between the world’s peace and eternal peace. Worldly peace means that the difficulties are taken away. Suffering and pain must be banished. There is no peace when they are present.

But as Christians, we have an eternal peace. Hardships, sickness, sin, guilt, the devil, and death may be what we see before us. They are present. They don't stop. They are encamped all around us. But even in the face of these, we have peace, strength, and comfort. "Peace be with you," Jesus says. We have courage and boldness even against the impossible. We have the peace of God which passes all understanding. These words that end practically every sermon here are not an empty phrase. Understanding and reason can seek only outward peace that the world gives. Yet Christ puts our hearts at peace and gives us comfort in time of need, even when needs are lacking.

"Peace be with you." When Christ speaks His Word, He lets the hardships remain, but He strengthens you. Out of timidity, He gives you a fearless heart. Out of trembling, He makes you bold. Out of a guilty conscience, He gives you a quiet peaceful conscience. He makes us confident, courageous, and cheerful in the things to which otherwise all the world is frightened: death, sin, and every distress of which the world's peace is no help. As Christ's forgiveness dwells in our hearts, we have the invincible, we have the true, we have the only lasting peace.

How do we obtain this peace? Jesus said "'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side...'" When Christ points us to His hands and side, that is, when He shows us through the Word that He was crucified for us, shed His blood and died, and thus paid for our sins and appeased and warded off God's wrath, then we have peace. This is comfort for our guilty conscience; this is divine forgiveness. We need not doubt; Jesus *is* our Savior.

And He still continues to comfort us with visible signs after His resurrection. Not visibly Himself, but through the preaching office, through His sent ones, through His pastors. We can say it as the catechism does – "I believe that when the called ministers of Christ, by His divine command, exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation, or absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself" –or the words of the liturgy: "Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word announce the grace of God to you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," take your pick, in either case, we're just the tools – God is one forgiving. An office means that the authority comes from somewhere else, namely, God. He is the One who forgives. And though we don't see Jesus, we believe as He reminds us that He shed His blood for us. It is enough the He showed His disciples once, to strengthen both their faith and ours; He truly is the same Christ who for our sake was nailed the cross and pierced for our forgiveness.

Or course, it's not enough to be told the history of the resurrection, as if by passing a test on the details we've suddenly earned a spot in heaven. The resurrection must be applied to us. That's what happened in Holy Baptism: the Old man is drowned and dies and the New man rises to new life. The resurrection is a treasure and salvation for us! We have peace and every good from God. Christ is our comfort and certainty. He has conquered everything and gives us everything.

What are the treasures of the world, the riches of wealthy men, gold, silver, gems, and whatever the world prizes compared to the treasure called the Forgiveness of Sins? You are liberated from the devil, death, and hell and are assured that God in heaven is gracious to you and so gracious that, for Christ's sake, you are God's child and heir. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠