

## Pentecost “The Gift of Peace”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, words can't even begin to describe how grateful I am for all the love and support you have given to me and my family. We couldn't have asked for a nicer sendoff for my dad. Grief is difficult for everyone, however, for us Catholics there is still joy underneath the sorrow because we know in our hearts he is with the Lord. That is a very good place to be! However, I will say this about grief. It is exhausting. And when you are exhausted, I don't care how much faith you have, there are going to be moments when you are just grumpy. Have any of you been grumpy?

I caught myself being grumpy the other day and so I decided to pray to God about all of this. I love praying to God when I am grumpy because I can give him my long list of reasons why I am grumpy. Have you ever done that? And, you know what? God responded as he always does. God inspired me to put my list aside for a moment so to look ahead to this Sunday's Gospel reading to consider what I might be preaching about. I also looked at my homily notes from the past, and I smiled. I couldn't help myself. God was talking right at me again as he always does. He even used my own words against me. I am still smiling about this Gospel reading because, there is the Risen Jesus standing before the disciples. What is he doing? He shows the disciples his glorified wounds and says, “Peace be with you”.

After everything Jesus went through, there he is, offering us the gift of peace. There are so many adjectives to describe how the disciples were feeling before Jesus appeared to them and “peaceful” was not one of them. They were feeling guilty about fleeing Jesus when he was arrested. They were feeling mournful in the wake of Jesus' crucifixion. They were also feeling afraid, hiding from the authorities out of fear for their lives. The Risen Jesus appears before them and says, “Peace be with you”. How very strange and wonderful! Jesus continues, “As the Father sent me so I send you”. Jesus breathes on them, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit and now these disciples are apostles. The word apostle comes from the Greek word meaning “sent”. What a turnaround of events. Jesus offers them peace. After they receive that gift of peace, they are sent out to the world as Apostles.

You see, for the Gospel of John, it is helpful to understand that there is a theology being articulated surrounding the idea of being sent. A way of understanding this theology is that in antiquity, when a king sent an ambassador to a neighboring kingdom, that ambassador was expected to be treated just the same as if that king was there himself. And so, Jesus is sent to us by the Father. This makes Jesus and the Father one. Just as the Son was sent by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son, the Apostles are now are one with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They become God's ambassadors and are sent to save the world, nothing short of that. They are sent to save the world by welcoming believers into the inner life of God himself, to become one with God by the waters of baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

What is the characteristic of an ambassador of God? Jesus says, “Peace be with you”. This means a defining characteristic of a Christian sent by God is the gift of peace. Even in the best of times, we can sometimes find it hard to live in peace with others, with family members, with neighbors, people we don’t agree with, the list goes on. There is still a lot of hate and violence in our world as we see in the news every day. However, sometimes the greatest deprivation of peace comes when we look in the mirror and refuse to love what we see. God loves that person we see in the mirror, why can’t we?

This is why I think it is helpful that, on Pentecost, the Church recalls the Risen Jesus appearing before the disciples and saying, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you”. For everybody, there are moments in life when we just feel hungry for that gift of peace. When we receive that gift, it then becomes a gift for the people around us because it is like a brushfire that spreads. How do we get there? In my experience, the journey towards peace begins with prayer. When prayer becomes a priority over the endless tasks we perform, when forgiveness becomes a priority over the grudges we cling to, and when hope becomes a priority over the grief we suffer, the Holy Spirit can finally transform our existence and life just simply gets better. It just simply does. We become sent to share this gift of peace with others, at home, at work, in the community, wherever we go. The peace the Holy Spirit offers can even cure a case of the grumpies, or whatever else is getting in the way. To get there we pray, “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.”