

## Pentecost “Peace Be With You”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Peace be with you! Some interesting trivia for you. At the greeting at the beginning of mass, immediately following the sign of the cross, if you are a priest, you say one of three things. If you are a bishop, you say something slightly different. The usual greetings you will hear from a priest at the beginning of Mass are, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”. Or you might hear the priest say instead, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”, or sometimes you will simply hear the words, “The Lord be with you”. However, if it is a bishop who is celebrating the mass, the Roman Missal expects something different. The Missal expects the bishop to simply greet the people with four words, and they are, “Peace be with you.”

As I reflect on why that is, I believe a large part of it has to do with the Gospel Reading this morning on this feast of Pentecost. Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit!” The Greek word for “sent” is where we get the word for Apostle. The word apostle refers to someone who is literally sent on a mission. It is this moment in the Gospel, this moment marking Pentecost, when the disciples receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus, and are sent, that the disciples are finally transformed into apostles. They are ordained by Christ for a mission, and they are sent.

Now, fun fact, the basic definition of what it means to be a bishop is to be a successor of the apostles. That is one of our titles. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are ordained with what we call the fullness of orders. The Holy Father on behalf of Christ, sends us for apostolic ministry. Most of the time, that sending takes a newly ordained bishop far, far away from his home. I am a very odd case in that, I am a local boy. My “sending” simply expanded the area in which I am called to serve in my role as an auxiliary bishop for Archbishop Etienne. However, my one essential job is basically the same as all other bishops. The Roman Missal makes it very clear what that job description is at the very beginning of every mass we celebrate. Our essential job is to spread Christ’s peace where ever we go.

However, what is this peace that Jesus wants for the world that can only come from the Holy Spirit? A careful look at the Gospel reading will shed light. You see, the setting for this Gospel reading is a locked room where the disciples were for fear of those trying to do them harm. Recall that only a day or two before, all these disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. They stood by helpless as Jesus was tortured and crucified. St. Peter even denied he knew Jesus three times. Christianity is a curious religion in that it is the only one in the history of the world in which its veracity depends on a specific moment in history. Either the resurrection happened, or it didn’t. Something happened, and that something had to be remarkable for these disciples to suddenly change from denial, desertion, and fear, to enthusiastically showing up in the public

square proclaiming the Gospel at the risk of their lives. These were mostly fisherman, not zealots, so what happened in such a short period of time for them to gain such courage? That something is what is recalled in our Gospel reading today. Jesus Christ really, and truly, rose from the dead, appeared to these disciples and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you.”

What is this peace Jesus is offering us? The peace Jesus offers us is the kind of peace that can weather a hurricane. Pope Benedict described it in his encyclical “In Hope We Are Saved” in that, the hope Jesus gives us in the future, that we have a future, ought to give us a gift of peace in the present moment in a way an unbeliever without that hope simply can’t. Indeed, it was the kind of peace that inspired thousands of martyrs to embrace witnessing the Gospel with their very lives, and still happens today. In fact, the last words on the lips of thousands of Roman martyrs in the earliest centuries of the Church were “Deo Gratias”, thanks be to God. When the Roman citizens saw this over and over again from these Christians, it had a way of befuddling them, “what do these Christians have, that I do not have? I want what they have!” In time their witness converted the Roman Empire. The Roman emperors did everything they could to dissuade their people from embracing Jesus as their savior. But nothing, not even violence, worked. In every age, it seems that in every culture, that instinct to dissuade would-be Christians is always at work. It is part of a bishop’s job to help local communities see the grace of God alive in the wider world around them so to not lose hope. So, let’s go there.

As I shared with our confirmandi last Thursday, in a span of 54 days this spring, I have 31 confirmations on my calendar. I traveled from San Juan Island to Stevenson near central Washington and a lot of places in between. A couple weeks ago, I put 1500 miles on my car in a span of seven days. In just a period of about a month and a half, I confirmed over one thousand Catholics. What do you think about that? I am just one of three bishops here in Western Washington and there are about 400 bishops in our country. You do the math. We are probably talking over 100,000 confirmations celebrated in our country alone in just the past couple months. Last August, I joined 1.5 million young people from around the world at World Youth Day with Pope Francis. 1.5 Million! What do you think about that? Name one other religion or organization that can gather 1.5 million young people for anything, let alone to spend a week growing in faith? The Catholic Church can. Pope Francis can. How much news coverage does any of this get? Ask yourself why. In my mind the reason for this is because the culture wants you to think that the Church is diminishing or dying when the opposite is the case. The culture doesn’t want you to see what I see, and what you can see today if you just look around you right now. Right now, look around you. Newsflash, the Church is faithful, the Church is multicultural, the Church is beautiful, and the Church is alive. Amen! Look around you. Doesn’t what you see here today give you hope? Doesn’t what you see here today give you peace?

Today we celebrate Pentecost. Today we celebrate the birthday of the Church. Today we celebrate the Eucharist, a celebration that is larger than what is happening within these four walls because the Body of Christ expands the whole world and back again. What this means is, no

matter what it is we are dealing with in our life right now at the moment, and life can get so, so really heavy and at times really hard. My friends, when life gets heavy, it is good news to be reminded that we are united as a family of faith that does not have borders. We speak many languages, that is certainly the case here at Saint Vincent de Paul, but notice how we can all understand each other when we pray together. And, it is such good news, that no matter what life throws at us, that because of the resurrection we know the end of the story. Don't we? What is the end of the story? Jesus is victorious. Amen? Jesus is victorious. What this means is: no matter what you are going through right now, God loves you and God's love can make all things new. So, let me simply end this homily as I began, and please feel it in your heart. Peace, be with you! Alleluia!