

I Easter 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*I St John 5.4-12 St. John 20.19-23*

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“Peace be with you”, Jesus said to his friends. They were locked in a room for fear of their lives. “Peace be with you”, he said to them a second time.

When Jesus said “Peace be with you” he was not just saying “hello”. He was giving them the absolute and perfect peace of God that passes human understanding in their hearts. His friends needed to be assured of God’s peace at that moment...calming their hearts as only he could do.

Jesus told his disciples as the Father sent him...he sends them out into the world to be his witnesses. They would remember what he said. We are also his witnesses. It is God’s peace...the peace that sustained his disciples...that sustains us too.

Jesus breathed on the disciples...the Holy Breath of God...and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. He told them if they forgave people sins, they are forgiven; if they do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

When a man is ordained a priest, the bishop uses the same words. The priest is empowered to forgive people’s sins. He is acting as an agent for Jesus. He has the duty and obligation to calm people down...to assure them of God’s peace in pronouncing absolution...whether corporately or privately.

Thomas was not with the disciples during the first two appearances Jesus made to his friends. They told him they had seen the risen Jesus. Thomas didn’t believe them and thought they were crazy. He wanted proof...he wanted to see the scars on Jesus’ body. He wanted evidence it was Jesus and not a ghost they had seen.

A week later Jesus made a third appearance to the disciples again locked behind closed doors. “Peace be with you”, he said again. He will say this many times. Jesus turned to Thomas and told him to put his fingers in the wounds in his hands and side. Thomas can only respond, “My Lord and my God”. The fact Jesus appeared to his disciples in a body still showing marks of the Crucifixion tells us something about what our own

resurrections will be like. Jesus rose from the dead in a body. He did not appear to his disciples as a disembodied spirit.

We will rise from the dead in bodies...perfected and glorified bodies...not as disembodied spirits. We can only imagine what our new and resurrected bodies will be like. But we will recognize each other just as the disciples recognized Jesus.

The disciples were happy to see their Friend, Jesus, once more, before he went back to heaven. They saw Jesus in his Resurrected body. We believe Jesus died and rose again in a body because of the eyewitness accounts of the people who saw him appear to them through a closed and locked door.

They heard his reassuring voice calling them by name. Even Peter, who ran away like a coward when Jesus was arrested, would know the peace that comes with God’s forgiveness. He would be happy and have courage to do the work of a shepherd watching over his sheep.

Pope Saint John Paul II always told people...especially young people...to be courageous...to go beyond their own limits and transcend themselves...in spite of fears and anxieties they might have. We can only have courage like this when we have God’s peace in our hearts.

In 1967, singer-composer Robert Repp (1942-2020) wrote a song entitled “Peace, I leave with you, my friends”. He based the song on today’s Gospel...

*...Peace I leave with you my friends  
Shalom my peace in all you do  
Peace I leave with you my friends  
I give to you so you can give to others too.*

We have God’s peace that passes our understanding in our hearts. We are witnesses for Jesus...to share his peace with others.

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