

2nd Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

(Acts 4:32-35 / John 20:19-31)

08.04.2018

Peace be with you

Dear brothers and sisters,

On the evening of the day of Christ's resurrection, the first day of the week, and again eight days later, Jesus' disciples were gathered together in prayer. Each time, the Risen Lord came and stood among them. He said to them: "Peace be with you". This was the beginning of a basic liturgical calendar that we still follow today. Sunday after Sunday, we gather together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Sunday after Sunday, the Risen Lord stands among us and says to us: "Peace be with you".

What is the peace that the Risen Lord gives us? Just before his Ascension, the Risen Lord told his disciples: "I am with you always, yes, to the end of time". The peace that the Risen Lord gives us is the fruit of His unceasing presence among us, beside us, within us. We are not walking the path of life alone. Jesus is with us. This is so important in a world where so many people are desperately lonely, even if most of us have at all times in our hands or in our pockets a so-called 'tool of communication' which in fact often isolates us by leading us into an unreal world. The presence of the Risen Lord by our side is also important because the trials of life are easier to endure when we are two to carry the load rather than each one of us left all alone with our difficulties.

The Risen Lord is with us. He is with us by his word which gives flesh to his presence. If, day after day, we listen to God's word, meditate upon it, keep it within our hearts and put it into practice, the peace brought by the presence of the Lord is not just a pious feeling or an empty word. We discover that the Lord is really with us, he talks to us, he listens to our cry, he enlightens our path, and he shows us the way forward. The Lord's presence through his word is something alive and active, and is a source of great peace.

The peace that the Risen Lord gives us comes to us from his passion and death on the Cross. The Risen Lord is the same who suffered his passion and died on the Cross. On the evening of the day of his resurrection he met his disciples and said to them "Peace be with you" and showed them his hands and his side". The following Sunday, the Risen Lord said to Thomas: "Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side". Yes, the crucified Christ and the Risen Lord are one and the same.

By his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus sets us free from the fear of death. With Jesus' death and resurrection, death is no longer a meaningless end but a passage towards fullness of life. Death is a painful passage, as painful as birth pangs. This is understandable because death is in fact a birth, a new beginning, an entry into fullness of life. With the resurrection of Jesus we are delivered from the fear of death. This is another facet of the peace that the risen Lord brings to us.

By his passion, death and resurrection, Jesus sets us free from our sins, and from guilt and shame. The forgiveness of our sins is another aspect of the peace that the Risen Lord offers us. Again and again the opportunity is offered to us to experience the Lord's mercy which is ever ready to forgive our sins if only we express sorrow for them and show signs of repentance. This is a particularly relevant message for us on this second Sunday of Easter which was chosen by Pope St John Paul the Second for the celebration of the Feast of Divine Mercy.

The mercy of the Lord is unlimited. There is no sin too grave to be forgiven. There is no sin even when it is committed over and over again which cannot be forgiven. The Lord never tires of forgiving us. The mercy of the Lord which is always offered to us invites us in our turn to be merciful with one another; to be loving, respectful, helpful in others' regard, and ever prompt to pardon those who offend us.

The peace received by us from the Risen Lord is a gift to nurture in prayer. Prayer is the moment when we can receive God's gift of peace and take the decision to share it with others.

If we want to receive the peace of the Risen Lord, first we have to accompany Him in the mystery of his passion and death on the cross, that is to say that we have to die to all our false securities, to our tendency to do things as we have always done them, and to our will to be in control of our lives and of the lives of others.

If we are terminally ill for example, first we have to consent to our illness – which is not an easy step – and then we have to open our minds and hearts to the full picture of life: death is not a meaningless end but a passage towards fullness of life, towards a communion of life for ever with the Lord and all our brothers and sisters in humanity. When we situate ourselves in this way, then the peace of the Risen Lord will be with us. The Risen Lord will take care of us and of those we shall leave behind us here on earth.

If we feel lonely and are depressed, we have to turn away from the temptation to identify totally with our inner darkness; we have to open our eyes to the presence of the Risen Lord who walks the path of life with us as he promised us He will. Usually we shall need the help of a brother or a sister to help us make the shift required of us. But the end is sure: little by little the peace of the Risen Lord will be with us.

If we were abused in one way or another, we have to consent to enter into a process of healing and forgiveness, a crucifying but indispensable process, if we want to be set free and live life to the full. Otherwise, our abuser still controls our life and ruins our existence. To refuse or neglect to enter into the process of healing can make of the victim we are a perpetrator of further ill against ourselves. No matter how terrible our pain, with time, the peace of the Risen Lord will be given to us.

If we harmed others in any way, we have to repent and consent not only to human justice but also to divine mercy, and the peace of the Risen Lord will accompany us during the whole painful process which is involved in recognizing our wrongs.

If we are overburdened by the trials of life, whatever they may be, if we renounce our efforts to try to sort everything out relying on our own strength alone, and instead welcome the help brought by the Risen Lord who stands by our side, then no doubt the peace of the Risen Lord will come to be with us.

The greeting of the Risen Lord to his disciples is addressed today to each one of us, whatever our situation in life may be: "Peace be with you". Let us welcome it and keep it in our hearts. Let us share it with others. Amen!