

Readings: Acts 16.9-15, Ps 67, Rev 21.10-14, 22 – 22.5, John 14.23-29

It's good to be with you again. Thank you Fr Andrew for your invitation.

Well, we've had the trifecta – an election, General Synod, and a war!

Glimpses of nation, church, and world behaving badly! 3 very different events and contexts, but sadly displaying some of the same distortions of human nature and the fracturing of relationship which have shaped humanity's existence from the start – division and conflict, the desire for power and control, inflated and ambitious egos, aggression and violence – if not in deed, then in word and thought, clumsy and manipulative dealings with the truth, duplicitous tactics, and a disrespect and hardness of heart towards others.

While we don't know final outcomes yet, or the ongoing implications of these events, if you're like me, it's enough to leave us overwhelmed, helpless and despairing as we witness the damage being done.

But into all this, Jesus introduces something new, something unique.

*Peace I leave with you; says Jesus. My peace I give to you, I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.*

In today's gospel, Christ entrusts his own peace to his community of followers, those who'll become his ongoing presence, his Body in the world. His peace entrusted to the Church, and by implication, to each and every one of us.

This is something much more than any peace the world can manufacture. It operates at a deeper level and has a much vaster reach.

As Brendan Byrne says:

*This is a peace that the world is utterly incapable of giving. Worldly authority can from time to time bring about an absence of hostilities between human beings and human societies; it cannot erode the fundamental insecurity and anxiety at the root of human existence. The peace Jesus is leaving with the disciples extends God's grace and love deep into the human heart. (252)*

We know what peace is not. It's not just an absence of conflict, or a silent stand-off. And it can never be born of suppression of the truth, oppression of peoples, or repression of feeling or memory.

Peace is not just about having things under control or feeling comfortable and safe.

The peace Jesus offers is something quite different to the calm and relaxation promised at the newest Spa Resort.

So what is this peace that Christ offers his followers?

Given that there are apparently followers of Christ active in all 3 of the aforementioned events, people to whom Christ has also entrusted his peace, one could be left wondering how we might discern it! However, we won't go there, as I would no doubt end up judging people of things of which I too am guilty!

The more important question is discerning what this peace of Christ is, and what it means for us.

The peace which Christ's gives is just that – something given – but not something for us to possess, take hold of, or even understand. This peace is something to live out of, a way of being – both because it offers a way into a greater reality, as well as a different way of being within ourselves.

This peace is a sign of the Risen Christ's life within us - a mark of our new identity as his ongoing presence in the world.

Jesus entrusts this peace to us, his own peace that has carried him through all the encounters and uncertainties and sufferings of his own life and ministry, a peace born of his relationship with his Father, the ultimate foundation for his life and his identity.

We are now being drawn into that same reality, and given a gift which will sustain and enable us to be Christ today, in this world in which we live. It's a gift that will enable us to live out the commandment to love that we were reminded of last week. It's a gift that reminds us of our oneness in Christ's body, the unity which Jesus will pray for us in next week's gospel.

And it's a gift that will be reinforced at Pentecost when the Spirit comes to guide us into our future.

Christ's peace given to the church - but each of us must also consciously accept it and be open to its indwelling.

How do we do this, except primarily through our prayer?

We all have different ways of praying. I know the number participating in the daily offices has grown here. I also know you have a Meditation Group.

But we're all unique and have unique ways of prayer. So however you pray, it seems to me our prayer is key for opening up to the Peace Christ offers us.

However we pray, as we move more deeply into our prayer, we can find ourselves carried beyond the words into a silence – a place of receptivity and waiting, a place of openness, an awareness of something more present.

Here we come to know the peace which Christ offers from the inside out, because we're opening ourselves to the presence of Christ himself. We find ourselves drawn into a place where all the false separations, the binary distinctions, the distorted perceptions fall away.

Christ's peace is given to the church so it can be incarnated and lived out in the world, and so is given to each and every one of us as beloved members of Christ's body.

One consequence of this gift of peace is that from it we can begin to reawaken and rediscover some of our own inner unity and deeper self.

As an example, I have lived with anxiety all my life.

Jesus says – *do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid* - words of comfort and encouragement. But his words don't touch where my anxiety resides.

His peace does.

And it's only as I've learnt over the years more about entering into Christ's peace, through the deepening of my prayer, that I've found new ways of being with the daily struggles to keep steady.

Discovering ways of allowing my anxiety to be absorbed into the presence and peace of Christ has enabled, not just some healing for me, but a deeper insight into my own inner landscape, and a greater awareness of the Christ who has always dwelt there.

This peace however is not my personal possession, but is, when I give myself to it, a reality to live out of, so that Christ's peace can flow through me and be activated in my way of being and behaving in the world, in my relationships with others, in my actions and choices.

But this gift of peace to Christ's followers is given for the sake of the whole body of Christ. Because as St Paul once reminded us, when one member of the body is fractured, the whole body suffers.

The more this peace does its work within us, the more we are freed to become Christ's peace active within the world. This will show up obviously in our relationships and our actions, but also in our prayer.

If you're like me, you've found it hard to know how to pray for some of the things going on in the world – the election, the Synod, and the war for a start.

But what we can do is enter that place of Christ's peace within us, and allow Christ's own prayer to work from there – to extend across the miles, freed from our own biases, fears, perceptions. Christ's peace within us extending, flowing out beyond us and our little worlds.

For that is our new capacity in the Risen Christ. We come to inhabit a much greater reality born not just of Christ's oneness with his Father, but of our oneness in Christ, and

consequently, with all creation. As we move more deeply into that peace which Christ has entrusted to us, so we find we're more able to extend that peace into the world, into those places where conflict dominates, towards those communities which are torn apart and frightened, and into a church where people have forgotten the gift bequeathed to us.

And we can believe it has effect.

There is a bigger reality in which our prayers are held, into which we pray – a reality not separate from the one we see and touch and live our daily lives in, but a reality infused with Resurrection's promise.

It is no accident that the Greeting of Peace is at the heart of our liturgy, the moment which ushers us into the Eucharistic meal.

The exchange of Christ's peace reminds us that all of us are recipients. Each one of us has been entrusted with that peace, a peace which offers us a way to live differently, to find a new integrity and cohesion within ourselves, and to discover new ground for the choices we make.

But the Greeting of Peace also reminds us that each one of us, in receiving Christ's peace, is also given a responsibility for it, to ensure that Christ's peace is free to flow outwards to others, and into the world.

Albert Einstein said that *"no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it"*.

What Christ offers in his peace is a different way of being, of knowing, a different consciousness to bring to our wounded world and church.