

# The Challenge of Peace

(4/25/06 Topic of Discussion)

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**Easter Season:** Following an ancient tradition, the church regards the 8-days from the paschal feast to the second Sunday of Easter as a single unit of joyful celebration (an octave), all as Easter Day. Following this, we are in the Easter Season.

Throughout the Easter season, the first reading at the Liturgy is taken from the Acts of the Apostles in order to illuminate the mystery of the church as it developed from its beginnings at Pentecost. Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and is considered the birth of the Church ([Acts 2:1-4](#)).

**The Second Sunday of Easter,** the first reading was from [Acts 4:32-35](#) giving an idealized portrayal of life of the early Christian community. The theme is threefold:

- a) *koinonia*: a sign of the presence of the Spirit within the community
- b) bold proclamation of the resurrection as another sign of the power of the Spirit at work in individual believers
- c) sharing of goods in common; an experience of God's reign already present in their midst.

The Holy Spirit came on the Christian church community forming the church. The people proclaimed their belief in the Father, in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. They shared all they had for the sake of others and the Christian community.

You may wonder today, where is the Holy Spirit in the church and in the people. You may feel afraid today to express you faith. You may wonder why there is no sharing and why there is fighting and conflicts.

Looking at the second reading of the Liturgy ([1-John 5:1-6](#)) written at the end of the first century, it was written to a church already undergoing a dramatic internal struggle around questions of "*right faith*" and "*right behavior*". So do not be surprised that today there are conflicts. Read the Epistle before the second reading ([1-John 4:17-21](#)). Conflicts happen. We all have internal conflicts within each of us so it is only natural to have conflicts in a group. As soon as there are 2 or more people in a gathering there are different opinions and conflict. *Right faith* recognizes Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. Believing is more than

intelligence; it is deeper. It is complete trust. *Right behavior* is reflected in mutual love among community members. It is to love one another. Jesus gave us a new commandment; *love your neighbor as yourself*. When we are *begotten by God* we hold fast to this *faith* and *testify* to the truth by a life in which we *love* the children of God. If we do not love someone we see, how can we love God who we cannot see? True faith comes when we become aware of whom we are and who God is and can proclaim... “*My Lord and my God*”.

Saint Thomas the Apostle, called the ‘Doubter’ or ‘Doubting Thomas’, is actually the most credible witness to Jesus’ resurrection. If witnesses were put on a witness stand to testify to Jesus resurrection, ...the women who went to the tomb found an empty tomb, Mary Magdalene did not recognize Him thinking He was the gardener. Also, her character and past were highly questionable. St. Peter and St. John who ran to the tomb; hearsay and again an empty tomb... But Thomas was not carried by emotion, he asked for proof. Only he could testify that, a week later, he saw Jesus and touched His wounds declaring, “*My Lord and my God!*”

And Jesus’ reply... “...*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*” (John 20:29).

The third reading of the Liturgy, the Gospel (John 20:19-31), is a story of *mission, forgiveness* and *faith*. This is our “*challenge of peace*”. The Risen Lord appears to His followers the evening of the Resurrection, when they gathered behind locked doors, afraid. He speaks a greeting of “*peace*” saying to them “*Peace be with you*” and He breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. As God breathed on the waters of creation, so Jesus now in this scene breathes on the disciples and gives them the Spirit, with an immediate creative effect. At once He commissions them to continue His own saving work... “*As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.*”

All the readings carry the concept of peace. Peace is not the absence of fear and fighting. It is more. Peace is a commandment.

The lack of faith, belief, peace...this is why things are not OK today.

Jesus ushers in the messianic kingdom and is the very presence of God among us. He brings to fulfillment what we cannot achieve on our own –

the peace of a people covenanted to their Creator. This peace is the gift of the Risen Christ to His Church. God's "*peace*" comes as both '*gift*' and '*task*'. It is poured out with the gift of the Spirit, yet remains a commandment given to His disciples for their mission in the world. We are in the Messianic times, the age of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit present in us changes us bringing us to a new life, a boldness, receiving both this *gift* and this *task* of peace. We need to build up the Christian community. Salvation is already here through Jesus Christ but also not yet here because we are waiting for Him to come again. Meanwhile, while we are 'waiting', our task is to build the community in the Christian life.

In our world situation, we have seen the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> and current centuries: the Holocaust of WWII and the nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. This *commandment of peace* is our challenge today, to establish peace in the world.

Peace is not merely negative, that is, the absence of conflict. Rather, it is the perfection of the covenant relationship between God and God's people that brings about the well-being of individuals and the whole community of faith. *Shalom* refers to a total harmony with nature, God, and self that issues forth in justice and is experienced in a fruitful land and in people whose needs are provided for and who dwell secure, free from fear and harm. If you remember Sr. Sandy's talk (*Day of Reflection* at the Church of the Annunciation in Paramus), she used a husband and wife as an example of covenant love and relationship. Each focused on the other. Peace is the perfection of the covenant of love between God and us. We offer our self to the other.

Against the background of the volatile situation of the modern world, our contemporary popes, the Second Vatican Council and the United States bishops have all spoken about peace.

Our understanding of peace is founded on respect for all human life...respect for the intrinsic worth of each human being.

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