

The Peace of Christ

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Epistle from St. Paul to the Ephesians the Apostle speaks about the peace that Christ has brought to the world through His victorious suffering on the Cross.

St. Paul says that Christ, through His own sacrificial death on the Cross, has broken down the wall of separation between mankind and God and has united both Jews and Gentiles alike into the one Household of God.

In so doing, Christ has fulfilled the prophecy which He Himself had made. For by being lifted up on the Cross, Christ has "drawn all men to Himself" so that mankind "should not perish but instead have eternal life."

Now this tasting of eternal life is essentially what we have been talking about these past two weeks when we've looked at what it means to be a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ.

We spoken about how being a Christian means experiencing even in this age that eternal life which is to come. Being a Christian means sharing in the common knowledge that Christ has overcome the world and is coming again to establish His Kingdom of which there will be no end. And therefore being a Christian means being filled with gratitude for what Christ has done for us and expectation for what He will do for us in the future.

Now today, St. Paul tells us that being a Christian also means being filled with peace – that peace of Christ which passes all understanding, that peace which is a gift of the Holy Spirit by Whom we have access to the Father.

One only needs to look at the Divine Liturgy to see how central peace is to the life of the Christian. From the first petition after "Blessed is the Kingdom" when we say, "In peace let us pray to the Lord," to the ending of the Liturgy when we exclaim, "Let us depart in peace!" we constantly ask the Lord for peace.

We ask "that the whole day may be perfect, holy, *peaceful* and sinless", for "an angel of *peace*, a faithful guide", and "for a Christian ending to our lives that is painless, blameless, and *peaceful*". And we ask the Lord that He will "give *peace* to His the world, to His churches, to His the priests, to all those in civil authority and to all His people." And it's hard even to count how many times the priest says "*Peace* be unto you all" and the people respond, "And to your spirit!" And so, from beginning to end, the Church's Liturgy is offered in and for peace.

Yet, as we all know, when we walk out the doors of the Church we enter a world that is anything but peaceful. The world is full of strife, anger, and hostility. We constantly hear about violence and murder, abuse and neglect, bombings and attacks. And because

of this more often than not what we see on the news or what we read about in the papers leaves us anything but peaceful.

And then in our professional lives and in our places of work, we often encounter instability and fear, tension and conflict, both from the competitive nature of business as well as from the occasional run-in with our coworkers or bosses. And sadly, these and other problems even sometimes make their way in our own homes and family life causing disturbances at the deepest emotional levels.

Yet, for the Christian all of this is to be expected. We know that life in this fallen world is not what it was supposed to be, nor it is easy. And we remember what the Lord said to His disciples before He went to the Cross where He willingly endured all the hostility the world could offer. He told His disciples that if they were to follow Him that they must be assured that in the world they will encounter much tribulation.

But then the Lord said, “[Even though] in the world you shall have tribulation; [still] be of good cheer for I have overcome the world!” This the Lord said during that same conversation wherein He told His disciples that even though He was going to the Father He would not leave them orphaned because He would give them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would grant them peace. Of this peace the Lord said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

It is this eternal peace which Christ gives to us in His Church. We ask for it continually, and it is continually given to us. Yet we all know that the peace of Christ is not something we can see with our eyes or hold in our hands – the peace of Christ is not a worldly peace. It is not a peace accomplished by political diplomacy, military success, or social reform – as good as these things may be at times – nor is the peace of Christ that feeling of security which comes with wealth and health for these things do not last forever.

The peace of Christ is an inner peace, an eternal peace, and a peace which comes even in the most difficult moments of our lives, even in the midst of the storm, even when everything around us may seem to be in chaos and disarray. And of course this inner peace of Christ is nothing other than the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who the Lord referred to as the Comforter, the One Who would strengthen and reassure the Christians.

So for the Christian, the acquisition of this inner peace, which comes through the Holy Spirit, is the most important thing in life. The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the way in which we are incorporated into Christ’s victory over the world – through receiving the Holy Spirit we obtain our salvation and we taste the peace of the Age to come.

Yet, as we have said, this peace of Christ comes to us in the midst of the storms and trials of this life.

Remember when the disciples were being tossed about in the boat by the storm late at night on the Sea of Galilee and the Lord came to them walking on the water, and what did He say? He said, "Be of good cheer. I am here. Do not be afraid!"

And what did the Lord say to His disciples when after His crucifixion they were gathered together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews? The Risen Christ came to them and said, "Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Peace be to you! As My Father has sent Me, so also I send you!" And then as the Gospel says He breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

With these words, "Peace be to you!" and "Receive the Holy Spirit!" the apostles were taken from fear to courage, from hiding out from the world to evangelizing the world. Through the Holy Spirit, the Apostles were strengthened to do what formerly seemed impossible – through the Holy Spirit they were empowered to take the Gospel into the world which had just crucified the One who had Himself brought the Good News.

In a sense, the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the courage to enter into the very eye of the storm which formerly had given them so much fear. And in the eye of the storm, when preaching Christ in the face of fierce persecution from the Jews and Romans, the Apostles experience the peace of Christ, that peace which passes all understanding, that inner and eternal peace which the world seeks but only God can provide.

Brothers and sisters, in the world we have tribulation – we all know this from experience. Yet we also know that we cannot run from the challenges and trials the world brings because we cannot outrun the storm.

Instead let us face our challenges by turning to the Lord Who Himself planted His Cross and established His Church at the very center of the storm as a haven for those seeking peace. And let us ask Him for comfort amidst our struggles, courage amidst our fears, and strength amidst our weaknesses.

And as we gather together in the Church around the Cross of Christ, we will see that there is peace to be found even in the eye of the storm for we will hear from the Lord Himself those words which He spoke long ago to His disciples, "Peace be to you!" and "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world!" Then the Lord will say to us, "Receive the Holy Spirit, as the Father has sent Me, so also I send you! Take this peace which I have won for you through My Cross into all the world, so that all may share in the joy and victory of My Father's heavenly kingdom!"

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!