

Peace

Homily for the Worship Service at Bethany Terrace Nursing Centre

October 9, 2011

By Daniel Love Glazer

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [Isaiah 9:6]

With these words, the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Prince of Peace. And, of course, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus, the Son of God, was incarnated on earth. When Jesus was born, in a stable in Nazareth, "a great company of angels sang praise to God: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.'" [Luke 2:14]

But is peace all so simple? When we look at the world around us, can we say that peace prevails? And what about in Jesus' time? He was the Prince of Peace, but did his appearance on earth inaugurate an era of peace? His life certainly was not peaceful. Neither was his death. In today's scripture reading, Paul speaks of the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding." [Philippians 4:7] Is such a peace just an illusion? If not, how can we experience it?

Consider this statement that Jesus made when he commissioned his apostles:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." [Matthew 10:34-36]

Jesus also said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." [Matthew 10:32-33]

Here is a clue. Jesus and his disciples preached peace, but the religious leaders of his time would not accept peace. They rejected Jesus and his gospel, the revelation of the love of the Father in heaven. There cannot be peace between truth and error, between life and death, between light and darkness. You and I, and every person has freewill. We have the freedom to accept God and thereby gain peace or to reject him. It would be easy for God to "snap his fingers," as it were, and create peace on earth by forcing everyone to follow his will and love his

neighbor, but God does not do that. Instead, he has chosen to create a world in which we have the freedom to accept or to reject the divine will. God will not force himself on anyone. We are free to declare, "it is my will that your will be done." If we do so, we enter the kingdom of heaven. And if we continue to be devoted to doing the Father's will, we will know peace on earth.

But peace will not come to the world as a whole until there is widespread acceptance of the gospel. Isaiah tells us that God "will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." [Isaiah 26:3]

Every individual believer can know this perfect peace in his own heart, if he truly consecrates his will to the doing of the Father's will. This peace is not an illusion, but a reality that each of us can experience as an absolute truth. Each of us **can** know sublime peace, the peace that passes all human understanding, peace that is free from all turmoil and doubt. Knowing this peace, we will be like the Apostle Paul, who said,

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." [Romans 8:38-39]

Jesus, in his farewell discourse, said "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." [John 14:27] What is the peace of Jesus? It is the peace and assurance of a child who knows that his career in this life and in the eternal life to come is securely and completely in the everlasting arms of a spirit Father who is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-wise.

After Jesus was resurrected, he appeared to Mary Magdalene and said, "Go to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." [John 20:17]

Jesus is telling us that God is not only the Father of Jesus, but the Father of each one of us. We all have the freedom to accept him as our Father and thereby know the "Peace that surpasses all understanding."

Thanks be to God!

Amen