

Immanuel, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023  
John 20, 19-23

### Peace? Really...?

The three churches of the OTPC are sharing the words of Jesus in this reading as a challenge for this year: *Peace be with you! As the Father sent me, I am sending you.* And given the world reality, this continues to be the greatest of challenges to us all. Since that first resurrection morning, the day of the new creation, Jesus has sent us, each of us, to be agents of peace in the world, in our time. A complicated challenge but no more difficult than it was to the first group of disciples.

The reading begins at night, darkness representing the absence of God... the disciples together in fear, behind closed doors. The world is against them. They don't know what to do, and the only place they find to feel secure is the upper room. And in spite of the locked doors, suddenly Jesus makes his presence, with a message of Peace and the marks of his death: the wounded hands and side. Marks that he will carry till the end of times.

What these frightened disciples lack is Peace, what they have in abundance is fear, and a sense of feeling inadequate. Of all words to hear, Peace is the first word Jesus has for them. Not only that, they are sent to become the makers of peace in a hostile world.

The Hebrew word Shalom, the Arabic word Salaam, the Hindi word Shanti, they all mean much more than what we say when we say Peace. Peace in the Bible is much more than the absence of violence, it is an all embracing sense of life in fullness; it is never an individualistic sense, it is a fulfilling reality for all people. It is the result of Justice, in a reality of Truth, of Respect, it is wholeness of life for everyone, where ALL humans are seen as children of God. This is what Jesus taught, lived, provided for and died for. And as was then, today there are many people who don't want this fullness of life for all.

This is what Pope Francis spoke about in his Christmas message, one we can all say Amen to. He said the world was "suffering from a famine of peace... and urged all people to look beyond the "shallow holiday glitter" and help the homeless, immigrants, refugees and the poor in their midst seeking comfort, warmth and food... "May the Lord inspire us to offer concrete gestures of solidarity to assist all those who are suffering, and may he enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to all senseless violence in Ukraine, and humanitarian crisis in Syria, Myanmar, Iran, Haiti and the Sahel region of Africa" said Pope Francis.

It cannot be Peace if it only satisfies the needs of few. Take a look at the Thought for the week in today's Weekly News. Peace is what we are sent to multiply and give away, and for this the disciples (and us) are given the Holy Spirit, so we can believe in forgiveness – ours and others. In John sin, is not like a stain that needs to be washed out, it is an attitude we can all fall into: selfishness when we become accomplices of injustice. And it is only in the power of the Spirit that we can be restored. We begin this New Year being sent to forgive and be forgiven and to really become agents of Peace, and when we do this together, the world will become a better place.

Peace be with you.... Let us now share that peace with each other, reminding all that we are a team, a family; we are God's children working together. Amen