



Pentecost

John 20:19-23

Dear friends,

Jesus had just experienced the most profound expression of evil ever in His Passion and Death. This encounter with the consequences of sin and death had terrorized his disciples. They hid in fear and confusion. Despair had conquered the most minimal element of hope. Faith and trust had fled with the arrival of the mob in the Garden.

They now huddled together in the naked vulnerability of their humanity.

All of a sudden Jesus is in their midst. His message is not vengeance. Amazingly, He does not even point the finger at their cowardly collapse. His trusted disciples were too awe-struck to feel the shame. It was a “wow” moment to the thousandth degree.

His message was direct, clear, and simple: ***“Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19)*** In addition to the peace He renders the power of forgiveness. These two gifts of peace and forgiveness are in the context of His commissioning of the disciples. ***“As the Father has sent me, I send you.’ As He said this He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the holy Spirit.’ ” (Jn20:21-23)***

Receiving the Holy Spirit is a symbol of a new creation. Just as God breathed life into Adam in the Garden, so too, Jesus breathed new life into the disciples that makes them holy and leads them to conquer evil. This is made possible by the love expressed in the gifts of peace and forgiveness.

After the encounter, the disciples’ story is very different. Fear gives way to courage and commitment. A new conviction leads them to confront power with patience and perseverance. The Gospel is proclaimed in spite of conflict and confusion. Cultural barriers and native parochial narrowness open up to a universal community that continues to grow in openness to this very day.

Just as in the Resurrection of Jesus, the changed disciples witness to the victory of love over evil and death. The seeds of the new creation began in the transformed hearts of these very

weak and pedestrian followers of Christ. They began an ever-expanding community of faith that has survived and prospered over these two thousand years.

Paul draws us into the beautiful mystery of how this new creation flows from the Spirit-filled hearts of the recipients of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians Paul writes: ***“I say live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desires of the flesh...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”***(Gal 5:16, 22-23)

Today, on this feast of Pentecost, we are invited again to receive the gifts of peace and forgiveness. To do so we need to turn away from sin which is a refusal to love. Like the first disciples, the Spirit beckons us to continually expand the horizons of our love. For most of us this demands forgiveness with a risk wrapped in courage.

The peace of Christ comes at a price. The patience and gentleness along with the joy and kindness and the other fruits of the Spirit described by Paul are ever so precious gifts. They are possible only in a heart seeking reconciliation that brings the new life of Christ into a world ravaged by sin and death. This is the call for us on this Pentecost: transform our lives by the gift of Christ’s peace and His call to forgiveness. Slowly, we must understand that for the Spirit there is no limit on forgiveness and the target of inclusiveness is ever expanding and dynamic. The numerous descriptions of “those people” in our heart have to give way a new definition of “us”. In this struggle to move out of our comfortable world, we will find the only way that leads to the prized gift of Christ’s peace.

