

In Nomine Iesu

Judica, the Fifth Sunday in Lent 2023 **Give Peace a Chance – Matthew 10:32-42**

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Victor over sin, death, and the devil. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

“Give peace a chance,” is the slogan found on bumper stickers and tee shirts. It is a wonderful idea. But what exactly does it mean to “give peace a chance?” If enough of us sincerely want peace, peace will just break out? The truth is that the way to peace is usually through war. In 1941 it did not matter that the United States did not want war with the Japanese Empire and its emperor. Even though we did not want it, Japan invaded the Philippine Islands and bombed the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor, and began a systematic conquest of the islands of the south Pacific and East Indies. The very next day Nazi Germany declared war on us. So, in order to protect and defend our nation, we responded with our own armed forces. It is not that we wanted war. We wanted peace. But man-made peace never had a chance.

When cancer attacks your body, it has declared war against your health and it seeks to kill you. You don't want cancer. You don't want to undergo treatment for cancer. But cancer itself must be attacked and defeated to bring you peace and save your life. You must go to war against it with proper weapons: chemotherapy, radiation, surgery or perhaps even radical dietary change. Cancer will not surrender without a fight. It does not respond to our desire for peace. It will not give peace a chance.

I

Jesus was born into this world to the angelic strains of “Peace on earth!” He came to bring peace between God and man. Yet He was marked for death by King Herod in the first months of His young life. God's plan for salvation, the sending of His only-begotten Son in human flesh to take on our sin, is a plan that the world and its prince, Satan, has been busy attacking ever since. The attacks against Jesus included trying to stone Him to death for blasphemy, as in the historic Gospel for this Fifth Sunday in Lent, calling Him the devil because of His power over demons, sneering at Him for eating with tax collectors and “sinners,” condemning Him for healing the sick at what

was deemed the wrong time, even attacking Him because His hungry disciples did not always wash their hands before eating. Finally, one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus to His enemies, which led to His crucifixion and death. Jesus' life was what the psalm describes: "My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war." (Psalm 120:6,7)

Jesus tells us in today's text, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Why must it be a sword? This seems wrong to us. Why must the Prince of Peace wield a sword? It is because His enemies would not stand to let His kingdom of peace come. His enemies, sin, death, and the power of the devil, could not be brought to the negotiating table, could not be reconciled to God, absolutely would not give His peace a chance. They are like cancer. You cannot make peace with such an enemy. Worst of all, they are not only His enemies, they are ours, whether we want them to be or not. For that reason Jesus told us a truth we just do not want to hear: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Jesus' task of bringing peace on earth was not the gentle task of being nice to people, of giving people what they want and need. No, for what they wanted was so often the very evil He came into the world to destroy. His was difficult, dirty, nasty work filled with struggle, with temptation, with sickness and death, with betrayal and shame. It was a war for the hearts and minds of people, hearts and minds filled with the poison of Satan and his demons. Even though Jesus is the Light of the world, His ministry on earth was surrounded by darkness and evil, so that in His last hours He would tell His tormentors in Gethsemane: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

The problem of darkness and evil is not one that is simply around us, found only and occasionally in others we do not approve of. And here is what we really do not like to hear: It is in us too. It is in those we love. So, Jesus warned us: "I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law' ... 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household'." This is not just war, but the nastiest kind of war, civil war. There is no middle ground, no neutrality, in this civil war. He says, "He who is not with me is against Me." If we think that we can have the Prince of Peace without conflict and war, then we do not yet feel the weight of His cross in our lives.

II

The truth is that the Gospel is opposed to the darkness and evil that is in the world. It is opposed to the devil, to the world, and to the desires and inclinations of our flesh. If we seek to accommodate the agenda of this world with the truth of Jesus in an effort to have our own little island of peace in the middle of this civil war, we will fail. The Gospel of Jesus Christ offends the world. The Son of God didn't come into the world to make peace with the world. He came to overcome the world, and then give it the peace that passes human understanding, the peace that does not end.

To give peace a chance, we must be ready for war. If we fail to confess Christ boldly in the face of those who oppose and deny Him, who set themselves against the peace He brings, we will bring on ourselves the judgment He renders against the church of the Laodiceans: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I

will vomit you out of My mouth.” (Revelation 3:15-16) “But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

But, dear friends, do not be alarmed. God knows our abilities or our lack thereof. He knows our fears in this world. He knows that the life of His people in this world is not easy. He assures us that His Son has overcome the world. The victory is already ours. We must be patient and trust. We must give peace, His peace, a chance to work in the hearts and minds of others through our lives and words. Furthermore, we are told, the Holy Spirit Himself prays for us just as Jesus prayed for Peter on that terrible night of evil, darkness, and betrayal. He prayed for Peter, even though He knew that he would soon deny Him three times. Peter would fail and weep bitterly because of it. But he did not run away from Jesus. And, more importantly, Jesus did not abandon him. Our Savior forgave Peter, and later gave him boldness to do great things.

We all have times in our lives when we did not confess our Lord as we should. We feared the laughter of friends. We feared the ridicule of opponents. We feared to be different. We feared loss of popularity, loss of fortune, loss of life. As Peter learned, Jesus’ suffering and death atoned for all our sins of not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. His forgiveness, His absolution, covers our sins, our denials, our lack of faithfulness. When Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” as He was being nailed to the cross, know this very well, He was not praying for His tormentors only. He was praying for Peter, and for us, for all whose sins He came into the world to bear and to atone for. He came to bring us peace.

Our Savior does not leave us. He assures us our sins of fear and weakness are washed away by His blood. By this He encourages us, strengthens us, gives us to know that He loves us in our weakness. He does not command us to be strong as He is strong. No, He urges us to trust Him to carry us safely through the darkness and evil that comes over us. He teaches us to pray that the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven, that it would “break and hinder every evil counsel and will, which would not let us hallow His name or let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world and our own flesh.” He urges us to give peace a chance, His peace.

The devil, the world, and man conspired against Jesus. Families were divided, friends alienated. The darkness sought to extinguish His light, and keep us enslaved to shame and eternal death. But the Son of God came to make war on our enemies, so that we can have peace. Jesus lived and died for us, who are born into sin, and so enlist us as soldiers no longer of darkness and evil, but of light and life.

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Listen to our Lord’s exhortation today. He encourages us, pleads with us, to rely on Him, on His power and strength. He does not intend that we fight and win this war on our own. He knows us too well for that. No, He says, “follow Me.” Trust Me. Rely on My loving-kindness toward you. I have fought this war, this dirty, nasty war. I have poured out My blood while sin, death, and the power of the devil jeered on that dark day at Calvary. I cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” I cried out as I went through hell itself to tear you from the grip of Satan, your accuser. And I rose again, the Victor in this war. Fear not. Confess My name before men. I will remember you, and I will confess you before My Father in heaven. Dear friends, He says to us, give peace a chance. Give My peace a chance. Trust Me. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria