

In Nomine Iesu

Judica, the Fifth Sunday in Lent 2025

War and Peace: not the novel, but the reality – Matthew 10:32-42

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For 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’*; and *‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’* He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall 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 power of the devil. Dear friends, fellow redeemed in Christ the Savior:

“Give peace a chance,” is a bumper sticker slogan you might see out on our highways and roads. It is a fine saying; behind it lies a wonderful idea. However, what exactly does it mean to “give peace a chance?” The thinking seems to be that if enough of us sincerely want peace, it will just happen. The truth of the matter is that the only way to peace is often through war. It didn’t matter, for example, that in 1939 Poland did not want a war with Germany or that in 1941 that the United States did not want to be at war with the Japanese Empire. But whether wanted or not, Germany invaded and conquered Poland. Japan invaded the Philippine Islands, bombed the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor, and began the conquest of the islands of the south Pacific and East Indies. The world wanted peace, but it got war.

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 use the various treatments against cancer. But cancer itself must be attacked in order to save you. Therefore weapons are used against the cancer: chemotherapy, radiation, and even surgery. Cancer will not surrender without a fight. It does not respond to kind words asking it to go away.

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 within months of His birth He was marked for death by King Herod. 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, calling Him the devil because of His power over devils, sneering at Him for eating with tax collectors and “sinners,” and even condemning Him for healing the sick at what was deemed the wrong time. Finally, one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus to His enemies, which led to His crucifixion.

Jesus' life was as the psalmist wrote: "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 another place, "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 speak of using a sword? It is because His enemies could not stand to let His kingdom, His kingdom of peace, come to us. His enemies, sin, death, and the power of the devil, could not be reconciled, could not be brought to the negotiating table. They are like cancer in your body. You cannot make peace with such an enemy. Unfortunately, these are not only His enemies; they are ours. For that reason Jesus told us: "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."

There is no paranoia on the part of Jesus. He understood the nature of His work here on earth. His work was not some gentle task of being nice to people, of giving people just what they wanted. No, for what they wanted was so often the very evil He came into the world to destroy. His was dirty, nasty work, work filled with struggle, with temptation, with sickness and death, filled with the poison of Satan and his demons. Even though He 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 those who arrested Him in the Garden of Gethsemane: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

The problem of darkness and evil is not one that is simply around us and in others we do not approve of. It is in us, and 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 sounds like not just war, but the nastiest kind of war, civil war. The truth of the matter is that 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, then we do not yet feel the weight of His cross in our lives.

The fact is that the truth of 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 own flesh. If we seek to accommodate the agendas of this world with the truth of Jesus in an effort to have our own little island of peace in the middle of this brutal civil war, we will fail. The Gospel of Jesus Christ offends the world. It is salt in the wounds of the world. It is not weak, watery tea. If we fail to confess Christ with the boldness and vigor His Gospel deserves in the face of those who deny Him and the salvation He came to bring us, we will deserve the judgment found in Revelation 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." (Rev 3:15,16) "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

II

But, dear friends, do not be alarmed. God knows our abilities. He knows that we have our fears in this world. He knows that the life of His people in this world is not easy. He assures us that it is not we but His Son who has overcome the world. The victory is already ours. We must only be patient and trust. 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 indeed fail and weep bitterly because of it. But he did not stay away from Jesus. And, more importantly, Jesus did not stay away from him. Our Savior forgave Peter, and later gave him boldness to do great things.

We can all find times in our lives when we did not confess our Savior as we should have. We feared the laughter of friends. We feared ridicule. We feared to be different. We feared loss of popularity. All these fears we bring to Jesus too, just as Peter did. And as Peter learned, Jesus' suffering and death atoned for these sins, too. His word of forgiveness, His absolution, includes our sins of denial. When He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," as He was being nailed to the cross, He was not praying for them only. He was praying for Peter, and for us.

Our Savior does not leave us forsaken here. He assures us our fears and weaknesses, our sins of every kind, are truly washed away by His blood. By this He encourages us in our faith, strengthens us, gives us the knowledge that He, our Savior, loves us even in our frailties. He does not ask us to be strong as He is strong. No, He asks us to trust Him to carry us through the darkness and evil that comes our way. 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," as our Catechism tells us.

The devil, the world, and, yes, fallen humanity conspired against Jesus. Families were divided and friends alienated. The powers of darkness sought to extinguish His light forever, and in that way to keep us all enslaved to shame and eternal death. So, yes, Jesus came to bring war to these enemies, so that you and I can have peace. Jesus came for us, lived and died for us, even though we are born into sin, and so enlisted as soldiers on the side of darkness and evil.

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Listen to our Lord's exhortation today. He tells us, encourages us, pleads with us, to rely on Him, on His power and strength. He does not intend for us to fight and win this war on our own. He knows us too well to demand that of us. No, He simply 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 mocked and jeered on that dark day at Calvary as I cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" I cried out, because I went through the torment of hell to tear your soul from the deadly grip of Satan, your accuser. And I rose again, the Victor in this war. So, fear not. Confess Me. I will remember you, who confess Me before men; and I will confess you before My Father in heaven. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria