

Peace be with you

The text for this coming Sunday (Second Sunday of Easter) is John 20:19-31. The setting for the first section is Easter evening. The disciples were huddled behind closed doors because they were very frightened of what the Jewish leaders might do to them. They were probably also very confused by Jesus' crucifixion. Guilt, too, weighed heavy on them because they forsook Jesus when he needed them the most. In all this Jesus comes to them.

The second section of the text comes eight days later. The 10 disciples had been telling Thomas that they had seen Jesus but he expresses the strongest of doubt and vows that he will not believe unless he sees and feels Jesus' wounds,

In all this craziness, Jesus comes with the message of *peace be with you* (John 20:19, 20 and 26). He does not come to rebuke and censure them with the Law. He does not call them out for their betrayal. He does not point out their unbelief. But, Jesus calmed their fears with an offer of peace.

Peace (shalom) was a normal greeting. However, this was not some whimsical overused greeting. Here peace was the opposite of the fear which they had been experiencing. Here peace was more than the ceasing of conflict and war. Here the Greek word for peace implied the salvation of the whole person. Now the Father's anger over sin had been satisfied through the death of His son, the perfect substitute for the world's sins.

We often give and receive well wishes. However, we seldom are able to really help and the wishes become mere empty words. Jesus, however, backs up his words of peace with actions. He forgave their sins and declared them that all was well. He commissioned them to be his ambassadors to receive his Spirit to forgive or retain sins. He condescended to the disciples and especially Thomas and showed them his crucifixion wounds. And, Jesus also has a message to us Christians to be blessed when we believe.

Our lives at times may be chaotic and stressful, but Jesus' offer of peace is always available. It comes to us in the Scriptures and is commonly found in the Epistles, especially in the opening words of many of Paul's letters. It is often used by our pastors in the greeting of their sermons. In Word and Sacraments Jesus constantly offers his forgiveness and peace of the soul that goes with it. Be blessed and believe.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for not remembering our many sins. Thank you for coming to this earth to live, die and rise again and thus making full payment for the sins of the world. When the messiness and meanness of life comes into our lives, help us to run to you for the peace that passes all worldly understanding. Amen.

