

Jesus Juva

DR. RONALD H. LOVE
FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
LESSON FOUR
PEACE

“Pax vobis”

“Pa vobis.” Latin for “Peace be with you.” To which the congregants respond, “Et cum spiritu tuo,” reciting, “And also with you.” They are the opening words for every pope’s Christmas Eve sermon, always titled, “Urbi et Orbi,” meaning “to the city and to the world.” This past year Pope Benedict XVI hoped that Christians would bring consolation to “those who are still denied their legitimate aspirations for a more secure existence, for health, education, stable employment, for fuller participation in civil and political responsibilities, free from oppression and protected from conditions that offend human dignity.” It is a Christmas calling, the season of peace on earth, as the Pope challenged, “May the child of Jesus bring relief to those who are suffering and may he bestow upon political leaders the wisdom and courage to seek and find humane, just and lasting solutions.”

Peace. Is it not found in obtaining one’s aspirations, having access to educational opportunities, to be healthy residing in a community with an adequate health care system, to be viably employed, and most importantly to be free from oppression, be it criticism from a family member, disenfranchisement from a neighbor, estrangement from a co-worker, or the belligerence of a supervisor. One does not need to reside in a Third World country to experience oppression and endure the anxiety of unaffordable health care. And it is not just political leaders, but all of us, who must let “the child of Jesus” inspire us to have the courage to be conduits for humanitarian reforms, bestowing unqualified friendship.

Peace is listed by Paul as the third characteristic of a Christian. Interestingly, not only is it a Fruit of the Spirit but the Apostle states when we put on the Armor of Christ we step into shoes of peace, that wherever we may be, peace will be present. These two references by Paul underscore the importance of tranquility of Spirit that a Christian must manifest.

Ramona Gargle, the mother of Gladys, comes, suitcase in hand, to visit the Thornapple family. Brutus, better known in the comic strip, that bears the same title, as “The Born Loser,” is dismayed at her unannounced arrival. Standing in the doorway Ramona inquires, “It would make you happy if I went home, wouldn’t it?” Turning and leaving with Brutus smiling in delight of her sudden departure, she announces, “Well, why would I want to stay where I’m not wanted!” Then, gleefully returning, she proclaims, “On the other hand, why would I want to make you happy!” It does make us wonder at times if people deliberately try to make our lives miserable. And if it is not a conscience endeavor, we wonder how such insensitivity could prevail unaware. Thus Paul guards us twofold to avoid such behavior, with the fruit of peace residing in our hearts and upon our feet the shoes of peace wherever we may walk, we have a harmonious relationship with whomever we may encounter.

Instructing the disciples on how they would continue in ministry after his departure, Jesus spoke these words, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” (Jn 14:27) Augustine, the great church father of the fifth century, reflecting on this passage preached these words, “This peace he left, after a fashion, in his last will and testament to his disciples, our apostles.” Pondering this thought, it is most profound. We all understand a will is an official document on the distribution of our worldly belongings. The only possession that Jesus had to leave behind, and the abundance of its quantity was sufficient for all, was peace.

While a pastor in the city of Pittsburgh, I have known several funeral directors who literally buried precious jewelry with the deceased, doing so despite the protest of surviving relatives. Staggering family rancor on a fair dispersal of diamonds and emeralds, the mortician shared that this would be the most equitable solution for all involved. Sad, but it is true. Think now, if instead of a family heirloom what was left to

be passed about the parlor was peace, love, forgiveness. True gifts of immeasurable value.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was the son of a wealthy merchant who forsook all to take holy orders and accept the vow of poverty. In 1208 he set forth on foot to preach the gospel. As he traveled he gathered followers to the number that he was able to establish the Franciscan Order. One of his most memorable prayers is titled "For Peace."

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen

Is it not our aspiration to be an instrument of peace? You and I may not be able to change global events, but the small world in which we dwell each day would be so enriched if we sowed love, invoked forgiveness, encouraged, consoled. All tears may not cease, but they would not flow unnoticed.

The "News and Courier," the local newspaper of Camden, South Carolina, reported this story. Richard Kirkland enlisted in Company E of the Second South Carolina Volunteers, in which he obtained the rank of sergeant. In the course of the day's fighting at Fredericksburg, wounded and dead spewed across the ground, 150 yards of desolate grass separating two lines of battle. Anguished moans of pain and cries for water were a constant. The general sat in the north room of the Steven's home where he could survey the carnage and plan the next maneuvers. Kirkland walked in upon him and asked permission to carry water to the wounded. Listening, the senior officer responded,

“Kirkland, don’t you know that you will get a bullet through your head the moment you stepped over the wall?” Acknowledging that, the general gave his permission, “Kirkland, I ought not to allow you to run such a risk, but the sentiment which actuates you is so noble that I will not refuse your request, trusting that God may protect you. You may go.” Though, the general did refuse the sergeant’s request to show a white handkerchief. It is best now to repost the actual newspaper account: “With profound anxiety he was watched as he stepped over the wall on his errand of mercy – Christ-like mercy. Unharmd he reached the nearest sufferer. He knelt beside him, tenderly raised the drooping head, rested it gently upon his own noble breast, and poured the precious life-giving fluid down the fever-scorched throat. This done, he laid him tenderly down, placed his knapsack under his head, straightened out his broken limb, spread his overcoat over him, replaced his empty canteen with a full one, and turned to another sufferer. By this time his purpose was well understood on both sides, and all danger was over....For an hour and a half did this ministering angel pursued his labor of mercy, nor ceased to go and return until he relieved all the wounded on that part of the field. He returned to his post wholly unhurt. Who shall say how sweet his rest that winter’s night beneath the cold stars!”

Kirkland, I am sure, did rest well that evening knowing that in the midst of chaos he was able to bring momentary peace. Kirkland now sleeps peacefully at the bosom of Christ, having fallen, as a lieutenant, at the battle of Chickamauga. May it be said so of you and me.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Ron Love