



MORE THAN A GREETING

In the reading from John's Gospel for the second Sunday of Easter, Jesus says 'Peace be with you' three times to the fearful disciples who are hiding behind closed doors. Shalom, the Hebrew word translated as peace, holds a depth of meaning that Jesus' first disciples would have understood.

As Nicholas King SJ writes in *Jesus Wasn't Killed By The Jews*, 'Jesus was a Jew and so was his mother and so were all of his first followers. So too ... were all the authors of the New Testament. Paul, as we too easily forget, was a Jew.'

Why then, were Jesus' disciples hiding for 'fear of the Jews'? Just as there are many varied expressions of Christianity, in Jesus' time there varied expressions of Judaism, for example, the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Zealots. Some biblical scholars think that the disciples who are in hiding after Jesus died, may have been rejected from the synagogue (the local Jewish house of prayer, reading and assembly) because of their views about who and what Jesus was.

FEAR TRANSFORMED

The biblical scholar, NT Wright, has described the rejection of Jesus' disciples from their synagogue, as not being a dispute between people who barely know or understand each other, but as being more like a family fight, a dispute between people who have lived with and loved each other. The most painful kind of rejection.

Rejection can lead to misunderstandings that foster prejudice and fear and an unwillingness to recognise our shared humanity.

By greeting his frightened disciples with peace, Jesus reveals that he wants his followers to have peace in their own lives and to enrich their community with peace through their ministry. He sets the tone for the Christian community by transforming their fear and filling them with peace before empowering the disciples to continue his ministry.

As Jews and disciples of Jesus, it is likely that they would have been familiar with one of the titles for the Messiah in Isaiah's prophecies as being Prince of Peace (Is 9:6) Jesus is their peace and ours.

SHALOM

Blessing with peace has a long history throughout the bible, such as the well known Aaron's Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.
Numbers 6:23-27

The experience of shalom is multidimensional; complete well-being, physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Shalom flows from all of our relationships being put right, with God, with others and within ourselves. Shalom holds a sense of justice, mercy and truth; it has to be worked at.

The greeting and blessing of peace is part of each Eucharist; it is at the beginning of each of the letters of the New Testament where it carries the full meaning of the Hebrew Shalom. Peace is an intrinsic part of being a disciple of Jesus.

The demanding task of identifying and acting on all the injustices that stifle peace is part of discipleship. Our peace with and from God gives us the grace to maintain unity and love with others through continual forgiveness and patience. Christ is our peace.

PEACE IN THIS TIME

In his Easter 2022 message for the City of Rome and the World (*Urbi et Orbi*), Pope Francis focussed on peace and highlighted the many places throughout the world that are in desperate need of the promised peace of Easter.

We have seen all too much blood, all too much violence. Our hearts, too, have been filled with fear and anguish, as so many of our brothers and sisters have had to lock themselves away in order to be safe from bombing. We struggle to believe that Jesus is truly risen, that he has truly triumphed over death. Could it be an illusion? A figment of our imagination?

No, it is not an illusion! "Christ is risen! He is truly risen!" Today, more than ever, we need him, at the end of a Lent that has seemed endless. ... Today more than ever, we need him to stand in our midst and repeat to us: "Peace be with you!"

Brothers and sisters, let us allow the peace of Christ to enter our lives, our homes, our countries

PRAYERS FOR SITUATIONS OF WAR AND CONFLICT

From Pope Francis' Easter message, some of the many countries in need of peace.

May there be peace for war-torn **Ukraine**, so sorely tried by the violence and destruction of the cruel and senseless war into which it was dragged...may a new dawn of hope soon appear!

May there be peace for the **Middle East**, racked by years of conflict and division. ... Let us ask for peace upon **Jerusalem** and peace upon all those who love her Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. May Israelis, Palestinians and all who dwell in the Holy City, together with the pilgrims, experience the beauty of peace, dwell in fraternity and enjoy free access to the Holy Places in mutual respect for the rights of each.

May there be peace and reconciliation for the peoples of **Lebanon, Syria and Iraq**, and in particular for all the Christian communities of the Middle East.

May there be peace also for **Libya**, so that it may find stability after years of tensions, and for **Yemen**, which suffers from a conflict forgotten by all, with continuous victims: may the truce signed in recent days restore hope to its people.

We ask the risen Lord for the gift of reconciliation for **Myanmar**, where a dramatic scenario of hatred and violence persists, and for **Afghanistan**, where dangerous social tensions are not easing and a tragic humanitarian crisis is bringing great suffering to its people.

May there be peace for the entire **African continent**, so that the exploitation it suffers and the haemorrhaging caused by terrorist attacks – particularly in the **Sahel** region – may cease, and that it may find concrete support in the fraternity of the peoples.

May the path of dialogue and reconciliation be undertaken anew in **Ethiopia**, affected by a serious humanitarian crisis, and may there be an end to violence in the **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

May the risen Christ accompany and assist the people of **Latin America**, who in some cases have seen their social conditions worsen in these difficult times of pandemic, exacerbated as well by instances of crime, violence, corruption and drug trafficking.