

“PEACE WITH YOU”: FIRST POST-RESURRECTION WORDS

by Eliot Kapitan

Greetings are commonplace. “Hello. How are you?” is a greeting most of us hear many times each day. It is so routine, in fact, that the expected response is something like: “Fine. Thank you for asking.” We may say this even when we are not so fine.

Sometimes, however, these greetings and responses go beyond the public protocol of being polite. Sometimes the greeter greets a close friend and really wants to know the truth. Sometimes the one being greeted really wants to, even needs to, say what is true.

HOW THE CHURCH PRAYS

In liturgies of the Church, greetings are judiciously placed from beginning to end. They are not the casual type of a chance meeting on the street or of a business transaction. They are, in fact, greetings on a much deeper level. They are greetings between people bound together in Christian love and unity.

The sign of peace is a three-part rite (a prayer and two greetings) that occurs in the Communion rite of Mass.

[PRAYER]

Priest:

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles:

I leave you peace, my peace I give to you.

Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,

and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom

where you live for ever and ever.

People:

Amen.

[GREETING ONE]

Priest:

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People:

And also with you.

[GREETING TWO]

Deacon:

Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

People:

All make an appropriate sign of peace, according to local custom.

The Roman Missal, © 1973, International Committee on English in the Liturgy.

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES BY PRAYING

The peace we possess is only because of Christ. His Easter greeting, his first words after the resurrection in appearances to the disciples is, "Peace be with you" (see Luke 24:35-48 and John 20:19-31). We have a part in sharing this peace. We have a responsibility in making peace. But we cannot do it alone. This peace we have, even when it seems tenuous, is because of the unity we share in Christ.

Every element of the Communion rite during Mass manifests the union Christians have both in Christ and because of him.

- **Lord's Prayer** – With Christ, we call God "Father" and pray for common needs.
- **Sign of Peace** – The words and gestures seals our harmony with God, with the Church, and with the whole of creation.
- **Fraction Rite** – The one bread is broken so that the one Mystical Body of Christ (the Church) may eat as well as drink the Body and Blood of Christ.
- **Communion** – The invitation dialogue (This is the Lamb of God...Lord, I am not worthy...) and the procession toward the table of the Lord pledge our desire to be Christ-like and share in his presence.
- **Communion Song** – The one procession to eat and drink the one Christ is accompanied by one song. Afterwards, all my sing a song of praise or rest for a time in silence.
- **Prayer after Communion** – This concludes the union-with-Christ rite in a final prayer and final "Amen" by all.

WHAT THE CHURCH LEARNS BY BELIEVING

Because of the unity we have in Christ, we are called to be peacemakers. This charge is given in the Sermon on the Mount from which we take on the name, "Blessed...children of God" (Matthew 5:3-12).

With unity there is peace. With peace there is unity, charity, justice. This liturgical prayer and behavior makes us kingdom people now and ushers us on the path to the New Jerusalem, the New City of Peace, the new heaven which is our destiny.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

January 1, in addition to celebrating the Octave Day of Christmas: The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (solemnity and holy day of obligation), is also the World Day of Peace. Each year, the Holy Father, names a special focus. With permission of the diocesan bishop, a Mass for Peace is permitted.

The bishops of the United States continue to write pastoral letters and statements concerning peace – in general and for specific needs. On 3 May 1983, the conference issued *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response – A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*.

This same conference, through the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, issued in 1977 the statement, *The Sign of Peace*. It can be found in the second volume of BCL Newsletters for 1976-1980. A very brief summary is contained in the more recent *Introduction to the Order of Mass: A Pastoral Resource of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy*, nos. 127-129 (Washington: USCCB, 2003).

The glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a summary for "peace" and offers nos. 736, 1716, and 2304 for additional information.

IN SUMMARY

Peace and justice work hand in hand. Both are found in Christ. Both are hallmarks of Christian people.