

Easter II
4/24/2022

AN INVISIBLE FIRE

This is an incredibly rich gospel that speaks of both fear and faith, of mercy and reconciliation, of peace and violence.

Fear closes us in on ourselves. Fear locked those disciples together but in the midst of that locked fear, the risen Christ entered speaking words of peace. *Peace, shalom, be with you.* Now the world at that time to say, peace or peace be with you, was a way of saying hello. So on one hand, this is a very simple greeting. And yet at the same time, there is a deeper meaning. In the midst of a violent world, in the midst of disciples who betrayed and even abandoned him, the first words of the risen Christ are of peace.

Peace isn't just the absence of conflict, peace is the presence of an order intended by God. Peace is ultimately, the presence of Christ. Jesus spoke of his peace which the world cannot give. That peace is the gift of his forgiveness and his mercy. Our common humanity calls us to peace and because of their commitment to Christ, Christians have a special obligation to work for peace in the world. So often peace involves Reconciliation. Jesus' life and ministry was about Reconciliation. We see that in his words, his actions and most of all by his death and resurrection, by his Paschal Mystery.

And now the Risen Christ bestows the Holy Spirit on his disciples and commissions them to continue his work of Reconciliation. *Whose sins you forgive are forgiven. Whose sins you retain are retained.* He now entrusts this ministry of Reconciliation to his Church, to be carried out in a very privileged way through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and also in our daily lives.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday we continue to celebrate the greatest act of mercy, the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus and the mission of the Church is to continue to share that mercy.

If fear closes us in on ourselves, faith can draw us out of ourselves. This Sunday in particular calls to ponder the gift of faith. St. Paul says we walk by faith

and not by sight. Sometimes people say seeing is believing but seeing is knowing. Believing is something different. Faith is a different dimension. Sometimes people talk of blind love or blind faith but true love isn't blind. Instead it allows us to see. True faith also allows us to see what we might otherwise miss.

Faith, while being deeply personal, is something we do together as members of the Body of Christ, as part of the Church. St. Augustine said, *Let us together believe, and together we shall see.* We seek to strengthen each other on our journey of faith. We think of faith as believing and of course it is but faith is also trusting, Faith is walking with a mystery. St. Ambrose shared a beautiful image of this. He described faith as an *invisible fire at work within those who believe.*

A great tragedy of modern thought is the lie that faith and reason, and for that matter, faith and science are opposed. That's not part of Catholic thought. As we proclaim every Sunday at Mass, faith is a mystery, something we will never fully exhaust and yet isn't something irrational. At times it goes beyond the rational, but isn't irrational. To realize that some things in life go beyond reason, is itself reasonable.

Through history many great scientists have been great believers and even great saints. St. Albert the Great and St. Hildegard of Bingen, are just two of those. Gregor Mendal who is the father of modern genetics and Georges LeMeitre who came up with the big bang theory were both priests and there are so many more.

St. John Paul II wrote an entire teaching letter entitled, *Faith and Reason.* He described faith and science as gifts of God. Pope Benedict XVI insisted that faith and reason need each other because without faith, reason falls into a cold, sterile rationalism and without reason, faith falls into superstition. Pope Francis adds, *By stimulating wonder... faith broadens the horizons of reason.*

Without faith in God, we lose the truth of ourselves, made in the image and likeness of God, saved in Christ and brought to new life through him. Without faith in God we lose our humanity. With faith, we can become more human and more holy and even see and serve Christ in our neighbor.

To walk in faith is to step out into a mystery, but into a mystery that allows us to be who we are called to be; into a mystery that calls us to be fully human. To walk

in faith, is to walk in trust with God's mercy. To walk in faith is to see Jesus truly present in the Eucharist under the form of bread and wine. Every Amen at Communion is a profession of faith of Jesus truly present in the Eucharist. A profession that some of our young parishioners will make for the first time today.

If fear closes us in on ourselves, faith and love can draw us out. Together we strive to live lives of intentional faith in God that lead us to lives of intentional love of God and love neighbor. By God's gift, may our faith always be greater than our fear. May the peace of the Risen Christ strengthen our faith in him. May that invisible fire of faith always burn brightly within us so that through faith, we may have life in his name.