

## You are God's instrument of peace

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year – Cycle C – 7 July 2019

Peter's Pence Sunday

Readings: Is 66:10-14c; Gal 6:14-18; Lk 10:1-12, 17-20

*“Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, ‘Peace to this house!’”* (Lk)

### Three Scriptural Signposts:

1. In the first reading, Isaiah describes in poetic, symbolic language the prosperity and peace which the ‘new Jerusalem’ will enjoy. “Towards her [Jerusalem] I send flowing peace, like a river,” promises Yahweh. In the First Testament, the word *shalom*, for peace, is not so much the absence of war as the state of wholistic well-being. The source and sustainer of *shalom* is God alone. *Shalom* means many things: good relations among nations (1 Kings 5:26; Judg 4:17; 1 Chron 12:17,18); bodily health (Is 57:18; Ps 38:3); prosperity (Ps 73:3); contentedness, on departure (Gen 26:29), on going to sleep (Ps 4:8), and at death (Gen 15:15); and salvation (Is 43:7; Jer 29:11). In sum, *shalom* is a comprehensive ambience and attitude embracing the political, social, mental, personal, religious, physiological and soteriological (salvation) dimensions of life. Moreover, the One who can ensure this state of wellbeing is God. Here, God is depicted in maternal imagery as a consoling mother—who nurses, carries her child upon her hips, and fondly dandles it upon her knees. The last line, “it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants” suggests that God will accomplish his plans for prosperity and peace through the instrumentality of people, God’s servants. The whole passage is a promise of peace, prosperity, joy and fulfillment.
2. The so-called ‘mission of the *seventy*’—or ‘*seventy-two*’ in some texts—is peculiar to the gospel according to Luke. In the previous chapter (9:1-6), Jesus called together the Twelve apostles and “sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (v.2). The group of seventy-two is a larger group of disciples who possibly learnt more from Jesus and were more capable of embarking upon a Christ-given mission. Numbers are always significant in the Bible. Just as the number ‘12’ represents the twelve tribes of Israel, the number ‘72’ is symbolic of the mission to the nations of the world since, (a) this is the number of the sons and grandsons of Noah; and, according to Gen 10:32, “from these the nations spread abroad on the earth;” (b) as mentioned in Gen 46:27, it also represents “all the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt;” (c) it is the number of the elders chosen by Moses on God’s prompting to be his helpers in governing the people [see Num 11:16]. In other words, the number indicates that Jesus is sending out a larger number of followers to proclaim the good news of God’s reign and to heal those sick with innumerable infirmities. The sending out of these disciples in pairs, two-by-two, is for mutual assistance. The lifestyle of the messengers will be as important as the message itself.
3. In the ‘*com*-mission’ given to the seventy disciples, it is important to note the following points. First, it is *Christ* who sends disciples, and hence, God’s Spirit will always abide in them. Second, he cautions them that they will be “like lambs in the midst of wolves.” Third, they were to be models of poverty, travelling light, without purse, bag and sandals. They would have to depend totally on God’s providence and the people’s generosity. Fourth, due to the urgency of the message, they should not waste time on long greetings and salutations

as people did in his times, but convey the core message, which is, fifth, “Peace to this house!” and “The kingdom of God is at hand.” Notice that, later, when the disciples return overjoyed at their own apparent success (10:17), the Lord reminds them that they are only ‘instruments of peace’, so to say, while He is the Maestro, the Master, who will use them to make melodious music. Indeed, He will bring God’s mission to completion. And, if they must rejoice, they could do so: “Rejoice ... your names are written in heaven!”

### **Linking the Second Reading to the Theme:**

The second reading highlights the attitude of one of Jesus’ greatest instruments, Paul, who glories not in circumcision as his opponents do, but in the cross of Christ, saying, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” Paul wants every Christian to be “a new creature”. The ‘newness’ consists not in externally shedding (circumcision) or adding things (wearing crucifixes, priestly robes, headgear, etc.), but in believing that, “The world is crucified to me and I to the world.” Paul is speaking of the ‘peace of salvation’ and assures the Galatians: “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule!”

### **The Psalm Linked to the Readings:**

The readings and psalm (66) refer to two of God’s gifts—peace and joy. While the first reading speaks of joy and peace after the restoration of the people from Exile, the psalm sings of joy with imagery derived from the Exodus. Note that peace and joy are both gifts of the Pentecostal Spirit.

### **Two Recent Papal Voices:**

Peter’s Pence Concern: In his Address to the Members of the St Peter Circle, 25 February 2006, Pope Benedict XVI said, “‘Peter’s Pence’ is the most characteristic expression of the participation of all the faithful in the Bishop of Rome’s charitable initiatives in favor of the universal Church. The gesture has not only a practical value, but also a strong symbolic one, as a sign of communion with the Pope and attention to the needs of one’s brothers; and therefore, your service possesses a refined ecclesial character”.

On Discipleship and Hospitality: Commenting on the gospel passage of the disciples being sent as ‘guests’ and ‘servants’ and ‘messengers’ to peoples’ houses, Pope Francis says: “A word at the heart of Christian spirituality, of our experience of discipleship is ‘Welcome!’ Jesus as the good master, the good teacher, sends the disciples out to be welcomed, to experience hospitality. . . We might say that a Christian is someone who has learned to welcome others, who has learned to show hospitality. . . It is about learning to live differently, under a different law, with different rules.” Are we both, enthusiastic servants? Generous hosts?

**Appropriate Anecdote**: The world-famous Paganini was scheduled to begin his violin recital, one evening, when he found that his Stradivarius violin had been stolen from its case and had been replaced with an old, ordinary violin. The audience was already seated, and there was no time to go elsewhere and bring in another violin worthy of the maestro. Undaunted, Paganini took the old instrument, tuned it to concert pitch and began to perform as if nothing untoward had happened. When he finished the recital, the audience gave him a standing ovation. Paganini then announced, “Friends, today I’ve performed on an old, ordinary violin; and, I’ve proved to you that the music is *not* in the instrument but in the Maestro!” In today’s gospel, the Maestro of mission, Jesus, sends You and I, using our mouth, heart, hands and feet, as His instruments of joy and peace.

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