

Proclamation of the Gospel

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to St. Luke.
Glory to You, O Lord.

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this, He stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as He said this, He showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, He asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; He took it and ate it in front of them.

He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And He said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily by Fr. Gerry Hurley

Larry King, not the one of CNN fame, but another one, the author, the essayist from Texas. I think he died in like back in 2012. He was a very prolific in his essays and he wrote a few plays. He wrote for many magazines around the country. But an interesting individual. He wrote an essay on, he had a great relationship with his father, and he wrote about that in an essay titled, "The Old Man." And he says of the experience when his father died the affect that it had on him. Here is what he said when he was looking at his father laid out in the casket when he saw those hands and they were across his chest. Reminded me my dad I remember seeing my dad's hands they were really large as he was laid out in the same way, but here is what he wrote and I thought it was so prolific. Seeing his dad there in the casket and those hands showing up he said, "I will never forget those magnificently weathered old hands. They told the story of a countryman's life in the eloquent language of wrinkles, veins, old scars and new. My father's hands always bore some fresh scratch or cut as adornment, the result of his latest tangle with a scrap of wire, a rusted pipe, a stubborn root. In death they did not disappoint even in that small and valuable particular. It is not given to sons to know everything about their fathers, but I have those hands in my memory to supply evidence of the obligations he met, the sweat he gave, the honest deeds he performed. By looking at those hands you could read the better part of the old man's heart." What a nice thought. What a nice reflection about father, and about all that he had done.

Yet one could see the semblance of those feelings and thoughts in the gospel today. Jesus appears after the Resurrection to the disciples and his initial greeting "Peace be with you," was pretty important. We're beginning to get that. Because when He appeared to them the first time, He didn't say it once. He said, "Peace be with you," and then He spoke to them about their situation, and then He said peace be with you again. He wanted them to be sure to get it. It's an important thought for us. The Peace of Christ, the Peace of God in our lives.

Then, after He had greeted them with the peace, He said, "Why are you troubled? And, why do questions arise in your hearts?" He appeared to them in the upper room. The upper room was the place where they had often gathered. And now He is saying why do you have all of these questions? He said, come here touch. Touch my hands, see. These are the hands that worked in the world for you to bring about this salvation. Look at my feet. Whatever it takes. How important were those words, peace be with you. It seems very clear that after the Resurrection this was the intent of Jesus to make sure the people had his peace, particularly the apostles — the gift of peace.

And if we look back on His teaching then we begin to get it in context. When we go back to the core of Jesus' teaching, this was the central truth — the importance of having His peace. We go back to the core of Jesus' teaching in St. Matthew's Gospel. The core of Jesus' teaching is summarized in Chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of St. Matthew. He teaches nothing else beyond what is contained in those two chapters. Everything that he does beyond chapter 7 is illustration or celebration or application of what he has taught. The first thing he teaches in chapter 5, the first 12 verses, they're extremely important. The first 12 verses are what we commonly call the Beatitudes. It's about attitude. How is my attitude? And, we call them the Beatitudes because Jesus is saying, if this is what you want to be, then here is the attitude that you've got to cultivate.

And we see nestled in there # 7 out of the 8 — the attitude — Blessed are the Peacemakers, or happy are the peacemakers as it reads in some texts. Blessed, abundant, happy, fruitful are the peacemakers, they will be called sons and daughters of God. In other words, the hallmark of real followers of God is being bearers or makers of peace. Wow, that's a challenge in our world! Naturally, it begs the question, am I a bearer of peace? What evidence is there in my life that I am a peace-bearer as son or daughter of God. In today's Gospel, before anything else, that is precisely what He offers them, peace. My peace be with you. We say it throughout the mass many times, peace be with you, peace be with you, His Peace. This is a gift that cannot be bought, sold, traded for, or bartered for. Only the Lord, Himself, can give this gift. How interesting that He begins with that gift. That's very subtle.

Because a lot of our religion, and a lot of our religious expression seems to do this the other way around. We have a lot of education, and a lot of thought about the fact that it really should be working the other way. If you understand what I mean — First of all we fess up -- we confess all of our sins, we acknowledge all the wrong that we've done and then maybe, perhaps maybe, we might have peace. It's pretty clear that was not Jesus' intent. In fact, He wanted them to have peace first, and then they could think about fessing up, and confessing, and acknowledging how weak, and how sinful, and how difficult things were. That's what we see unfolding in this Gospel. It's pretty important, particularly in view of what we are looking have in the larger picture. The Church, often described as a hospital, contains too many patients who fail to get well. The Church, often described as a school, contains so many students who fail to learn. This was a real learning experience after the Resurrection. How He wanted them to have peace, so they would become peace-bearers.

The Apostles were gathered in that Upper Room when He greeted them. The upper Room was important. The fear in the room was palpable when He appeared in their midst. There were bittersweet memories in this room -- this is where He had washed their feet just recently. That was the room where He had shared the Last Supper with them. That was the room where they had on that night pledged loyalty to Him, and it hadn't lasted even through the night. They had a lot of issues. They had a lot of struggles just as we do. The Apostles were individually wounded. They were stunned by all that had taken place. They were heartbroken. They were struggling saying, what in the world are we going to do now? He was dead and that was it. And they were absolutely ill-prepared for the reality. They had a sense of hopelessness. They were afraid to put one step in front of the other, and they were shored up or hold up in this room, and despise the fact that they were in

there, and the doors locked, He appears right there in their midst. And the first thing He says to them, I want you to have my peace. It's pretty important.

They had a real sense of fracturing. The unity had been broken. The unity that they had experienced so much with Him along the way. One of them, he was gone off on his own, they didn't know where he was, he was having some kind of a Faith crisis, it would appear (Thomas). And they see him later, and they said, we've seen the Lord. He said, go away. I'm not going to believe anyway until I see for myself. He was having a little meltdown. Maybe just in a little because of what happened. Then another one of them was dead. He had taken his own life, he was so distressed and out of sorts. So, they were an extraordinary eclectic group gathered in that upper room when He appears, and He says, peace. Peace be with you.

Like all people in pain, they had set barriers around themselves. Ironically, all these chaps later became saints in the Catholic Church. Isn't that amazing! Wow! But, that makes it hopeful. That's where our inspiration comes from. They had to go through that hospital and that school, that learning experience. Yes, the Church needed to be a hospital for the Apostles -- just as it is for us. A school -- it needed to be a place of learning for them even after the Resurrection. They hadn't learned it along the way, and now they were in a kind of an accelerated class really trying to catch up on this. All that He had taught them along the way, now it was beginning to come into view. They could remember the Beatitudes. They could remember the teaching. How important it is that you have my peace if you are going to be proclaiming my message.

So it also needed to be a school for them where they learned. Where they learned the message again anew, and not just learned but began to practice it. Because there will be no point in learning the message and not practicing it. The key is in practicing. A lot of people know the message, but practicing is the difference maker. We must practice it.

So, for us as we continue to grow, and continue to develop and nurture ourselves, and experience the sense of the Church being hospital, the Church being school, education place for us. How we see ourselves? How do you see your own self? How do you see your parish community? Are you a saint? How many saints? God we're scared to say, maybe. Because we would have plenty of folks that would take us down quickly say, ay, but you don't live by them, right? So we have that anxiety, but hey we all want to be saints, right? Amen? Sure, because we're committed to Him and trying to journey toward Him, just like they are. So you know, it's not a matter are we a saint or a sinner. We're both. We're both of those realities were turning toward the fulfillment. As St. Paul, our good friend, says: "All sin and fall short of the Glory of God." All means everyone -- you and me -- all of the holy men and women throughout the ages, all of the Saints and all of the martyrs -- all hopefully recognized and saw their own imperfections.

So as we look at ourselves as church and as church community, and why do we come. When we come to church how do we see ourselves? Are we coming to a hotel for Saints? You know, where your book in and you get all the amenities, and you get to use the amenities, the swimming pool, and you pay your bill on the way out? Hey, sometimes it may look a little like that. Or, is it a hospital for sinners? Or, is it more like a service station where we get filled up and hopefully it will sustain us at least through Wednesday, and then we'll struggle Thursday and Friday, and we get back again? Maybe so.

What is the image? How do you see your Church community? How do you see your engagement, your involvement in your Church? What you think? What do you experience? What do you hope for? As we look carefully at these, the apostles, our fore-bearers, it's amazing what happened. And it happens for us as well in the very same way, if we want it to happen, or if we struggle to be open to it.

What really happened? Jesus didn't wait for them to come to Him. Pretty important. He came to them while they were still fearful - guilt ridden - despairing - clueless. They were cowards. They had betrayed their promise of loyalty and to be faithful to Him. We surely know those feelings in our own lives!

And yet what happened was in one bold move — there He was in the midst of the fear which was palpable in that upper room where they had many memories. He stood right there in their midst, and He said, Peace. That's what I want you to have. Peace. How important! A peace which the world cannot give, that is my

gift to you. No money, no amount of accumulation of things can give us that peace. He, alone, can give us that gift. That's why He wanted them to have it. How important it became. 2000 years later, here we are because of that. Because they were able to assimilate that, and take in that gift of His peace. We think it's the wrong way around, perhaps. Because we have this notion, at least I do, and probably many of you, because I was raised up on it. Well, you do this first thing, you do this, and you do this, and then maybe, you'll have peace. Right? You go ahead and you fess up, and you go to confession, and you tell all of your sins, and you do this and this and this, and then maybe you'll have peace, right? No, go ahead, tell me! That's the way I learned! That's for sure the way I learned. And here, Jesus is absolutely flying in the face of that. He's saying, no, receive my piece first, and then you can think about all of the reconciliation and making amends, and being forgiven and being reconciled.

It's not something new. It really is something He did all the way along. Remember the conflict He constantly had with the Scribes and the Pharisees. He's sitting with tax collectors and sinners. He did it all of his life. Now he is really illustrating it to the apostles. He sat with people who were sinners, and offered them peace by His very presence. What happened is many of them began to reform because they could see the goodness in Him, and then begin to see the goodness in their own selves just by sitting with Him. And, as a consequence, many of them reformed their lives. That's why He could later say in the presence of the leadership of the Church, He could see tax collectors and sinners are going into the Kingdom ahead of you. That was bold. People who've been through all sorts of addictions and difficulties and struggles are going into the Kingdom ahead of you. Why? Because they're capturing the truth. And, they're beginning to accept the peace and the relationship. The peace and the relationship are really important because the peace was an expression of forgiveness.

One of the great theologies of the new Sacrament of Reconciliation was the net result of Reconciliation is peace. But, the part that we might not have is maybe the peace comes first if we trust Him. The peace is what enables us to go forth, and make amends, and be forgiven, and be reconciled. It's a different way of seeing. That's what He taught them. And, what happened? Peace be with you, he said, not once, but twice in His first appearance. Then He says it again. Now, He says it again when He appears for the third time, and in receiving His peace the apostles were now struck by the fact that death had been overcome. Now we could move through the gate of death into the promise of life with Him. Good had triumphed over evil. His death had overcome all sin, all fear, all anxiety. All we had to do was say, let me be a part of that. That we were free, free at last, thank God Almighty! Free at last!

Yes, the Church, often described as a hospital, contains too many patients who fail to get well. The Church, often described as a school, contains too many pupils who fail to learn. Perhaps the reason is that we really do want the Good News. We want the peace, but we're not quite as willing to share it. Maybe we haven't learned the art or the way of really sharing it. The thing is, so long as we stay stuck in that position, it will never work. You can't have the peace unless you let it flow through you. If I filter it and withhold it from other people, that I really don't know His peace. So, maybe that is the reason. I invite you to be reflective of that during the course of the week — that we want His peace, but maybe we're not as committed to sharing it with others in kind. Maybe we're not as generous and that we're just a little shadow of that generosity. But, He wants us to be more like Him and to be generous, to receive the peace, and then extended to others in kind, and then move toward the reconciliation, and the forgiveness, and knowing the abundance of His mercy.

And the question is — Am I willing to share His peace as much as I am willing to receive it? A hospital? A school? Yeah, the Church is certainly a hospital. It's a school. I want to thank you for the fabulous responses that you gave me to our invitation to be reflective on this. The bulletin this week — did you see it yet? Wow! Liz gave that lovely feline perspective of the Church as a hospital, the Church as the school. And then, Cheryl gave an extremely wonderful history of that healing, and that forgiveness in the Church. Read it. Be reflective of it. And, hey, keep writing me. Let's keep the dialogue of the Church, often described as a hospital, contains too many patients who fail to get well. The Church, often described as a school, contains too many pupils who fail to learn. Is this the church's witness to the world, sick and ignorant disciples who know not the Christ whole they claim as Lord? It's pretty important.