

As I think back to when my kids were little, I remember times when I would leave them with a babysitter so I could attend an event. I remember that, at some point in their development over those early years, each one of my kids experienced a form of separation anxiety. They would cry big crocodile tears as I would leave, and I in turn would feel terrible that I **was** leaving them. The truth of the matter is they stopped crying shortly after I left, and they were happy and content the rest of the time I was gone. I am sure most of you who are parents have had this same experience with your children. Separation anxiety is a normal part of development. Sigmund Freud once said such “anxiety in children is originally nothing other than the expression of the fact they are feeling the loss of the person they love.” I am also sure that most of **you** have some memory of what it was like to be the one who is **left**, and you probably have felt the anxiety that accompanies such an experience. Some may remember feeling some form of separation anxiety when you were left to face your first day of school. Some of you may have felt anxiety when you found yourself left alone at the end of a broken relationship. And many of you know the grief and anxiety of being left when faced with the loss of a loved one. It is quite

likely all of us understand what it feels like to be left alone and the anxiety we feel when we face an uncertain present and future.

In today's gospel reading, we find the disciples facing a serious, severe form of separation anxiety. It is the last evening of Jesus' life as he spends it with his disciples before his betrayal, before he is handed over to those who hate him, those who will take him away to be executed. Jesus knows he is going to die, and he has been communicating this to his confused disciples. I imagine they are quite bewildered as they struggle to understand what Jesus is saying. Their whole life over the last three years had been consumed by following Jesus – he **has** been and **is** their guide, their rock. Without him they will be totally lost. So, as Jesus is speaking these last words to them, he addresses their anxiety, their fear, and their troubled hearts. He says, "I'm telling you these things while I'm still living with you. The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. The Holy Spirit will remind you of all the things I have told you. I'm leaving you **well** and **whole**. That's my parting gift to you. **Peace**. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left – feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught."

(The Message)

When Jesus says the Father will send them the Spirit, he also tells them the antidote to their fear is the **peace** that he gives, the **peace** he leaves with them. Jesus indicates that when the Spirit comes, they will experience the **security** of the ongoing presence of God and the Spirit will reveal to them the implications of what God has done in Jesus. The security of which Jesus speaks is **not** a security in the sense of physical safety, but a security that will enable them to courageously live into their **calling and purpose**. And if they have **that** security, they will be able to meet the threats they will surely encounter. It is this presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit that will calm their troubled hearts when they cannot see a future without Jesus. This is the **peace** with which Jesus leaves them.

We live in a world that yearns for peace. We yearn for peace in Ukraine and so many other places in this world. We yearn for peace in our own country and our own communities. We long to see an end to conflict, an end to violence, an end to the gun violence that seems to erupt all around us. We live at a time when we are being called to **face** the truth that our country was founded on racism, something that cannot be denied, something that it is festering and bleeding over to the point that the sins of racism and white supremacy are blatantly pedaled and promoted in certain factions of our society. We see our siblings of color consistently subjected

to the violence of a system that says they are less-than. So, the **world** leaves us with shattering trauma, with the slow ache of depression. The **world** leaves us with the grief we experience as we see those we love slip away into addictions, slip away into violence, slip away into death that eventually takes each and every one of us, always too soon. Frankly, the **world** with all its fragile beauty often leaves us feeling like the floor has fallen out from under us, feeling utterly alone, numb, and helpless.

We as a people desperately need to hear this promise of peace that **Jesus** gives to us on this day! It is **not** the kind of peace the world can give. Jesus tells his huddled followers that he does **not** give as the world gives. He does **not** leave them the way they're used to being left. Jesus is offering them and each one of us a very different form of **peace**, something **more** than the absence of violence and conflict and hatred. The peace Jesus gives is far more encompassing. It is the wider, broader concept of **shalom**. The peace Jesus is describing is about the total **wellbeing** and **wholeness** of the person and community. And he promises the Holy Spirit will bring a peace that will **quell** the disciples' fears regarding the impending, ominous future that is unfolding before them. The peace that Jesus gives is nothing less than the consequence of the presence of God. When God is present, **peace** is made manifest.

Any kind of peace the world offers only brings a brief pause from the anxiety we live with on a day-to-day basis. It is a counterfeit peace that comes to us from outside our being. But the peace Jesus gives is very different, and it is all **gift**. The peace of which Jesus speaks comes from the **indwelling** Spirit of God. As we bask in God's love, let go of our need to control and turn our anxieties over to God, we can trust God's presence to us and rest in Jesus' gift and promise of peace. Freedom from anxiety is directly related to putting our whole trust in God's gracious, loving presence and experiencing God's peace. And Jesus freely gives us this gift of **peace** with no expectation in return, only a hope that, **transformed by this peace, we might pass it on as gift to others.**

People, you have been baptized into the body of Christ, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever. I know there have been times when some of you have faced anxiety and there will be many times in the future when you will face loss, challenge, and more anxiety. However, Jesus' words to his disciples two thousand years ago are words that speak to each one of us today. The indwelling Holy Spirit brings Jesus' actions into this very present moment, this present tense, and our very lives. The same one who sent Jesus as the Word made flesh sends

the Holy Spirit as the refresher of God's presence to us on this day and in each moment of our lives.

Jesus' disciples were experiencing fear and anxiety, a severe kind of separation anxiety, as they tried to understand and face the loss of the person they loved. We are no different than those early disciples. In the quagmire of our anxiety, Jesus gifts us with his peace. As people who have been Eastered, we have the Holy Spirit in us and with us, the Spirit that is always at our back, the Spirit that is the very presence of God, the Spirit that is closer to us than our very breath, breathing peace and possibility into us, giving **us** calling and purpose as we face the challenges of this present time and live into God's dream for this world.

Let us pray: O Holy Spirit, you were with the frightened disciples in that upper room. You were with the bereaved and traumatized disciples at the foot of the cross. You were with the abandoned disciples through Holy Saturday and with the amazed disciples on Easter Sunday. Thank you that you are with us now as we face our challenging and anxious times. Help us to trust and rest in the peace that Jesus has given us. Help us to truly be Easter people in this world. Give us courage to move beyond ourselves. Give us courage to walk in this world. Give us courage to **love** as Christ has loved us. We pray all this through the crucified and risen One. Amen.