



All the glory and beauty of Christ are manifested within, and there He delights to dwell; His visits there are frequent, His condescension amazing, His conversation sweet, His comforts refreshing; and the peace that He brings passeth all understanding. Thomas a Kempis

April 7th **The Shofar** **JoAn 20:19-30**

When is Peace *not* Shalom

The Romans boasted about what they called The ***Pax Romana*** (Roman Peace). It was a period of relative peace and stability across the Roman Empire which lasted for over 200 years, beginning with the reign of the emperor Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD). It was achieved through the power of the sword and obtained only through the wiping out of whole tribes of peoples who chose not to live as slaves under Rome. Peace was purchased at the cost of the lives of many. The aim of Augustus and his successors was to guarantee law, order, and security within the empire, even if this meant separating it from the rest of the world and defending, or even expanding, its borders through military intervention and conquest.

In today's world we are all too aware of the scarcity of peace. It remains elusive and no matter how many battalions of tanks we throw at our enemies, lasting peace is not to be found. We have violence and disorder in so many forms all around us – Alice Springs, domestic violence, crime, national conflicts, ideology clashes, theological squabbles and the list goes on. Too often our parish communities are far from centres of the ***shalom*** promised by Jesus.

Not only does the world not have peace, it does not know where peace is to be found. Where do they look? From where does it come? The mission of the Church is spelled out for us in today's Gospel. Just prior to the Risen Christ sending his disciples out into the world, he gave them an essential tool for evangelizing: **Peace be with you.** This is Christ's gift to the world.

Shalom is a name for God

The thing about biblical shalom is that it is about relationships. Primarily a relationship with God but including a relationship with fellow men and women as well. While it includes the notion of an absence of conflict, its primary power is in the establishment of a community of wellbeing, one in which the fruits of the Spirit are evident... *love, joy, peace, mercy, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-*

control. They are qualities God alone can bring, establish, and maintain. This **Shalom** is what happens when a person or a community builds their lives around God and live according to the New Covenant set in place by God's loving mercy, in Jesus Christ.

Peace is what God promised the world

Isaiah had prophesied that God was establishing a ***New*** covenant with his people, a covenant that will inaugurate a ***new*** creation...**32:18**... *until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.* ¹⁶ *Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.* ¹⁷ *The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.* ¹⁸ *My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.*

God, says Jeremiah, has plans for peace for his people, a future reality where the people will live in prosperous times, a future that is pregnant with hope (**29:11**). This future Shalom is a return to our origins, to the time of creation. When God began his work of creating, the world was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. It was a time of chaos but then God stepped in. God created and God maintained the universe through gracious love and the world prospered. It was filled with an abundance of good things and the man, and the woman lived in harmony with their Creator and with each other. That state of living is called peace, God's ***Shalom***. This was the promise proclaimed by the prophets, the hope of Israel.

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the goal towards which God is working, i.e. the ultimate end of his mission, is the

establishment of *Shalom* and along with it reconciliation with God and unity in Christ. This is something God does, something God alone can bring to fruition. The source of all *Shalom* is God. *Shalom* is what God does and who God is. It is a way of living God offers to all.

***Shalom* is what Jesus does**

The first taste of this peace promised by God through the prophets came with the life and ministry of Jesus who is the Christ of God. All that was promised by God to Israel finds its fulfilment in him. Most especially in his death and resurrection. It was proclaimed by the angels at his birth...*Glory to God in the highest heaven and shalom to God's people on earth.* Luke picks up this theme when speaking of the ministry of Jesus... *This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is Shalom with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).*

Paul takes up this same understanding and preaches that Jesus brought about this *messianic peace* through his death on the cross. It was a death reconciling God to man and men and women to each other...*therefore, because we have been declared righteous by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).* He broke down all barriers that had been erected separating off God from his people... *For Christ himself has brought Shalom to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups (Ephesians 2:14-15).*

This is the lot of those who choose to follow the Way of Jesus and live their lives trusting in God. It is what Paul prayed for, *that the Shalom of God surpassing all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7).* This *divine Shalom* is essential if men and women are to taste of the good things of the new paradise established here on earth and awaiting those who persevere in faithfulness. What the old Adam lost, the New Adam (Jesus) restored.

This **Shalom** is the way of life for Christian communities...*so then, let us pursue those things that work for the promotion of peace and what edifies one another (Romans 14:19).* This kind of relationship (permeated with **Shalom**) is characteristic of the Reigning of God on earth...*for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).* This is the work of the Spirit...*but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5:22).*

Paul understood this **Shalom** to be an active ingredient in the way of life of the community which is why he opens his letters with the greeting – **grace and peace**. This is a combination of traditional Greek (*chairein*) and Hebrew (*shalom*) greetings. These are not the equivalent of our “G’day”. They are statements of faith and of hope – *let the grace and peace that is already ours in Christ be what governs our relationships together. Peace* is what we share, the foundation for all that comes along in our relationships together when that peace is what God is doing.

Shalom in the midst of fear

We can now better understand the gift of Shalom Jesus offered to his disciples in that upper room. They had locked themselves away *because they were afraid of the Jews*. Given all that had happened, that is not much of a surprise. But what is significant for us is the way the Risen Lord came to them. Jesus initiated the contact. He came to them amid their fears and declared himself to be their **Shalom**. He was not going to remove the source of their fear. Rather, he transformed them so that fear did not define them. There amid their personal chaos, Jesus reigned as King.

At the same time he was offering them forgiveness, reconciling them to himself and to God. Once they abandoned him and ran to save their own skins and now, here is the Risen Christ inviting them into a new life. In Christ that Upper Room became the New Eden with all its joys and blessings.

What did Easter change? Easter changed those who dared to believe Jesus died and is risen from the grave. The world is transformed in them and through them and the gates of hell are unable to stay locked against them as long as they persevere in faithfulness to Christ. That too is our hope. IT is where we need to begin anew our post Easter life.