Resurrection

THE NEW SHOFAR

God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing. - C.S. Lewis

Athanasius of Alexandria:

Easter Promises vs Selfish Ambition

Biblical social teaching affirms the values of human dignity and a respect for life that finds its origins in the story of creation. It defends the equality of all persons, especially the weak and defenceless. But does the Bible guarantee that the realization of such conditions will automatically lead to peace?

The answer is no. Here is the reality we so easily overlook. We live in a world that is stained by original sin. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, we have struggled with dissatisfaction, self-indulgence, and greed. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23), wrote Paul. It is for this reason that the world does not function as God intended.

Our modern social justice warriors claim that a perfect society can be created by social reform. If we engineer and legislate for the right conditions, they proclaim, we will usher in an age of order, harmony, and prosperity. However, there is a Truth they do not seem to understand: the human condition of selfishness will never allow it. Sin is too deep.

Opposition to Truth

No one lived out God's commands as perfectly as Jesus Christ, and yet his life was certainly not marked by peace. Whole chapters of the Gospels record the confrontations Jesus had with the religious leaders of his day. These were no abstract, theological discussions. Even though he had done nothing wrong, the Truth he spoke resulted in violence and hatred. Therein lies a key point to remember: At times, Truth will be the enemy of peace.

Spiritual Evil works against peace in our time

In Ephesians 6, Paul acknowledges spiritual forces whose goal is to defeat the Church. They are not enemies of flesh and blood but rulers and authorities of "this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12). Those who are tempted to dismiss such notions as mere fantasy should remind themselves of Jesus' own confrontation with Satan and the authority, he gave the Church to defeat him (cf. Matt. 16:18). If the Son of God believes in spiritual evil, so should we.

We live in a country where the message of tolerance has become ubiquitous. Moral relativism asserts that one person's convictions are as valid as any other's. Personal feelings have replaced moral norms, and we are told that no one has the right to teach what is right and what is wrong. Indeed, very concept of evil is laughed at, and we hesitate to defend absolute Truth. But evil does exist, and we are not inherently responsible for sins committed against us. Injustice is not always to blame. *They hated me without a cause* (John 15:25), Jesus told his disciples. Likewise, Jesus never promised peace to those who pursue justice: *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you* (John 15:18). Proclaiming the Truth will always bring with it an element of personal suffering.

A Gospel of Peace

How then are we to understand the Easter message of the Church as a "gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15)? First, we must appreciate that the peace of the Bible is much more than the absence of conflict. The word Shalom/Peace suggests completeness, health, justice, prosperity, and

protection. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, something God and God alone produces in individuals and communities when they abide in him.

Peace grows only through conversion—one person at a time. Jesus' first triumph was to establish peace between human beings and God. *Because of* Christ's death and resurrection, sin no longer blocks our relationship with God. *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 5:1). **The work of peace begins in individual human hearts that have surrendered to Jesus**.

Peace is also Jesus' gift to those who follow him. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you;* Jesus told his disciples (John 14:27). Peace is the blessed assurance we can experience in any given circumstance, more powerful than the human mind can comprehend and Jesus offers it generously to those who will submit their lives to him.

Paul challenged the early Christians to strive for peace: *if possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all* (Rom. 12:18). This is the real challenge of Christian living: We are called to empty ourselves of pride and selfishness to become channels of Peace. Only those who know Jesus Christ personally and depend on him will have the spiritual resources required to live out their baptismal promises and spread Peace (Phil. 2:13).

As the Church moves into this Easter season, we need to trust that Peace is neither a pipe dream nor the product of a social movement, some trendy philosophy. It is a guarantee given by God to be filled in an age to come. It is the hope of a future ruled by the Prince of Peace when he returns in glory. It will be the mark of his kingdom, which will have no end.

Until then, we are caught in the tension between the present reality and our future reassurance. *We hope for what we do not see* (Rom. 8:25), wrote Paul, as we wait for God's plan of redemption to be completed. God calls us to participate in his plan by being salt and light to the world, rather than sitting on the sidelines.

Peace is what happens when God is at the centre

Sometimes the Gospel will require us to pursue Justice even when it brings disharmony. We may have to sacrifice peace because of the need to speak the Truth, but the work of redemption begins and ends only with God. As the ambassador of peace, the Church proclaims a two-fold message. ***The first*** is that the world's promises are false. This world can never achieve the kind of Peace we crave, given the godless solutions it offers.

The second points to our only hope for peace: Jesus Christ. Paul's letter to the Colossians expresses the Church's responsibility most plainly: *Him we proclaim* (Col. 1:28). Only Jesus Christ can offer the kind of peace for which this world hungers, because he alone is the source of Peace. The absence of an enduring Peace in the world is not a sign that the death and resurrection of Jesus changed nothing. It points to our unwillingness to *test everything; hold fast what is good* (1 Thess. 5:21). It is a reminder that we are yet to truly repent, fully undergo a conversion of life. At the end of the day, Peace will belong to those, and only those, who have Christ himself alive and active in their hearts.