

Peace and the Christmas Season

It's funny how you can read or hear the same scripture stories time and again, then one day a line will jump out at you with all the vitality of a first time hearing.

During the Christmas season I was reflecting on the daily readings and I was struck by a line in the letter of St Paul to the Colossians where it says, 'And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body.' (3:15) For this! The whole point of being part of the Church and drawing others to our community is so that we may all together experience this peace of Christ reigning in our hearts.

I mentioned this line to a friend that same day who immediately reminded me of Jesus' first words after the resurrection: 'Peace be with you!' (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19) And what is Jesus' parting gift in his farewell words to his disciples? 'Peace be with you; I give you my peace.' (Jn 14:27)

Finally, with what title do we hail the birth of Jesus at Christmas time? 'Prince of Peace'. (Isa 9:5) Christ is born into a world of violence, where thousands of babies are slaughtered at the hands of the murderous King Herod (see Mt 2:13-18), and yet as the Church we declare him 'Prince of Peace.'

What can we take from this astounding claim, this claim that

as Christians living in a world afflicted by so much conflict, assailed by our own personal anxieties and doubts, we nonetheless cherish the tangible gift of Christ's peace? For myself, I find both a comfort and a challenge. The comfort is that at some deep level in my own life's journey I know this to be true! Alleluia!

The challenge is that there is still so much room for growth, in my own life and in the world around me. This promised peace does not spring out of nowhere. St Paul's words tell us how to find it: by responding to God's call to be 'one body', to be immersed in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. What a challenge! We are to bring peace to one another, by the way we love, forgive, reach out, build up, show kindness and compassion. And by our dedicated works such as in the areas of parenting, teaching, medicine, psychology, pastoral care, relief efforts, grief ministry and so on....What a beautiful New Year's Resolution: to be a better peacemaker, in family life, in parish life, in the community at large.

Finally, as the body of Christ we have tremendous healing gifts to offer through the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. God soothes our woundedness and brings peace, not by human effort alone, but by divine power unleashed in the sacraments. In the year ahead there are myriad opportunities to experience and bring others

to the healing grace of the sacraments. Let's open ourselves to their life-changing power. •

