



Archbishop of Montreal

Homilie
Sunday, May 31, 2020

Pentecost Sunday – Year A (Jn 20, 19-23)

Are There Fears in Your Life?

Fears have a way of building walls around us!

As we speak, we are either still in confinement or just about to begin deconfinement. We are still experiencing being confined to our homes, walled in and living behind closed doors, not unlike the apostles who also lived a period of confinement behind impassible walls.

Fear, too, can lead to confinement: fear of the future, fear of sickness, fear of failure, fear of losing a job, fear of not finding a job, fear of rejection and fear of loneliness. We are subject to many fears.

When the apostles and disciples were locked up in the Upper Room, Jesus Christ had the power to show himself to them, ignoring physical constraints, passing through walls and beyond walls: Jesus is not stopped by walls.

He also has the power to overcome our fears and the walls that they build around us, these walls that we built up ourselves through which he passes to be closer to our heart. What is the first thing that Jesus does when he draws closer to our heart? What is the first thing that he did with the apostles? He said to them, “Peace be with you!” He said it twice! “Peace be with you!”

Just as this peace had the power to dispel the fears of the disciples, it has the power now to dispel our fears and give us peace. The peace of Jesus Christ has the power to free us from the prison of fears that can at times hold us captive. This does not mean that we are not allowed to be afraid. As the saying goes, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but courage is overcoming fear.” In overcoming the walls of our fears, Jesus Christ comes to give us peace.

In the current time, but really always in the history of humanity, we need the peace of Christ. Now more than ever, we need it as we are troubled by many fears. Fear is a reality in human life, such as the fear of not having enough love in our lives or not finding meaning in our life. Perhaps we are searching for some meaning that we can give to our lives or maybe we cannot find it because it keeps escaping us.

In evangelizing, we may also be fearful that nobody will want to hear about Jesus Christ, fear that faith has disappeared, fear that we now need to keep our faith and the name of Jesus Christ hidden behind the many walls behind which we are all too often hidden.

Be not afraid! Jesus brings his peace. He is peace personified! He is peace. He brings peace to our hearts.

In his wonderful pedagogy, he progresses stepwise. Had he begun by saying to the apostles, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” they would not have been able to accept this message,

they would have been caught in their fears. Jesus had given them peace. Therefore, he could say to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Strictly speaking, there is only one true mission. It is the mission that the Father gave to the Son. The Son is mission. He must accomplish the mission received from the Father. He is the fullness of mission, the faithful incarnation of the mission. He is the mission itself.

For us, too, there is only one mission. And what is it? It is the mission to go out to all the world to lead the world to God. It is the mission to go out to all the world, everywhere, at all times, and lead humanity to the Father Eternal. This is the mission: Going out from the love of the Father Eternal, in love, to bring back all humanity into the hands of the Father Eternal.

Jesus speaks to us also when he says, “As my Father has sent me, so I send you.” “I, too, send you out into the world to participate in my mission to lead humanity to the Father Eternal,” he says. “I send you.”

What is the first element in Jesus’ mission of leading humanity to the Eternal Father? What is the first element of Jesus’ mission? It is peace. Jesus is the peace that give us his peace. He is the peace that pacifies. He is the peace that sends us out in mission. And the heart of this mission is to be instruments of the peace of God.

Our world needs peace. We all seek peace in all kinds of ways. But real peace is found in Jesus Christ who is uniquely peace. This world offers many forms of peace, and they all have their merits, but they are only peace with a lower case “p,” in the sense of being easily threatened.

Some make the case that finding rest is a way to find peace, but clearly, we will grow tired again and our rest will again be disturbed. Others make the case that health is a way to peace, but then we suddenly get sick and perhaps develop a chronic condition. Then there are those who see in prosperity a path to peace, but we might lose all or most of what we have, and then our economic stability is shattered.

I say it again, the paths to peace in this world have their places, but they are peace with a lower case “p.”

What, then, is peace with an upper case “P”? This real peace, this peace that nothing and no one can stand against, this is the peace of Jesus Christ who gives us his Peace.

Even in the greatest struggles, Jesus has the power to give us his peace. When we are in the midst of a fire that devours all, Jesus has the power to give us his peace. When we are utterly humiliated, Jesus has always the power to give us his peace. When we are terribly sick, he has the power to give us his peace. In our worst defeats, Jesus has the power to give us his peace. This is because Jesus is peace with an upper case “P” and he gives us his peace.

Over and above giving us his peace, he gives us the extraordinary gift to send us into the world and bring with us the peace of God. He gives us this grand, this beautiful mission, the mission of bringing peace to the world.

Being the Church of Christ is to be a Church that brings peace to the world. Being a missionary disciples, the true sign of being a missionary disciple is to bring peace to the world. It is a peace that only Jesus Christ can give! Only Jesus Christ is the true peace that nothing can overcome. What a beautiful mission! What a great mission!

Let our fears not hold us back. Let us find the courage to overcome our fears! Let us draw on our strength to go beyond our fears, those fears that confront us in a thousand ways! These can be the fear of what others will say, the fear of rejection, the fear of not being heard, the fear of being ignored! Overcoming our fears is always worth the effort!

Often, we rationalize our fears by saying, “It does not matter, they will not listen to us,” and then we do not speak the name of Jesus Christ. Another one is, “Oh, they are elsewhere, they are busy,” and we do not speak the name of Jesus Christ. One of the most common reasons for identifying oneself as a Christian in our society is the following: “Ah, they have already made up their minds, they stay away from Church, they do not like the Church, they are against the Church, look how they critique the Church,” and then we do not speak the name of Jesus Christ.

Our fears easily become the justification for not speaking the name of Jesus Christ. Our fears become irrefutable reasons, but they are just reasons with a lower case “r.” Nevertheless, these reasons paralyse us and keep us from speaking publicly the name of Jesus Christ!

By themselves, the apostle would have never been able to leave the Upper Room and go out to speak of Jesus, to announce the name of Jesus. It would have been impossible.

What did Jesus do? He said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” But shortly thereafter, he told them: “You will receive the Holy Spirit.” He means, “You will receive the Holy Spirit because, by yourself, you are not capable to act and give witness to me.”

He means, “When you look at yourself and think you can’t say my name, you probably think that’s a problem.” “But for me,” he says, “it is not a problem because I give you the Holy Spirit!” “With the Holy Spirit, you have everything that you need to complete the mission that I entrust to you. You have all that you need to lead humanity to God. You have deep within you the instrument of God’s peace.”

Stop focusing on your limitations! Stop thinking that you are not strong enough, not smart enough, not intelligent enough, not rich enough or that you do not have enough money. These are only excuses.

“I give you the Holy Spirit that will give you the strength to witness the Love of God in the world. With the Holy Spirit, you will lack nothing. With the Holy Spirit, you will have no excuse, no excuse at all not to be in mission!”

Do you know Blaise Pascal, whose powerful expressions woke up people? “The drama of man is that he looks for excuses and often finds them.” If we look for excuses to not go on mission, we will indeed find them. No doubt about it. But Jesus has given us his spirit, he gave us the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit, there are no more excuses! With the Holy Spirit, we must stop making excuses to not speak publicly the name of Jesus Christ.

Filled by the Holy Spirit and with the peace of Christ, the apostles were able to overcome their fears, to leave them behind and move out from Jerusalem to proclaim the name of Jesus. Does this mean that now there were no more problems? Not at all! The problems continued and the apostles were challenged in many ways! Some were crucified, some were persecuted, but the Word of God continued its path around the world.

Thanks to the witness of the apostles and disciples, the Word of God spread to the ends of the world, and the Word of God accomplished miracles. Lives were transformed, families were comforted, and entire peoples converted to the love of Christ.

Through the action of the Word of God in them, by their faith in Jesus Christ, through prayer and Adoration, supported by the sacraments. Many men and women all across the world found new meaning in their lives, found a new strength to live and to love. What a very fruitful time!

Even with the Holy Spirit, problems continue! Of course, there will be new challenges that will not be made to just disappear with a wave of a magic wand!

But we will see how the Word of God is fruitful and outgoing. The mission will increase and peace will reign eternal.

Peace! This peace that all seek. Whose heart does not thirst for peace? We have that peace! With Jesus Christ by our side, with his presence among us, we have this peace in plenty. We have the peace that the world looks for. What are we waiting for to give to the world? What are we waiting for to bring this peace into the world?

Often, we imagine something and find reasons to be worried. Some worries are quite real. There is both hidden and explicit racism that rears its head and flares up. Indeed, there are reasons to worry, and we must not overlook them. But stronger than fear is peace, real peace, the peace that Christ gives.

At this feast of Pentecost, while still in this time of pandemic, let us ask the Holy Spirit to lead us out, not only from physical confinement, but also from the confinement of our fears.

Let us ask that the Holy Spirit moves us into the mission entrusted to us, the mission to proclaim Jesus Christ, to proclaim the peace of Jesus Christ. There is only one mission; it is to follow Jesus Christ who leads us to the Father Eternal!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal