

*From Galilee*

Homily for Holy Saturday 2022

George Weigel, is the official English biographer of Pope St. John Paul II. Back in 2015 he was in Kingston addressing the annual chaplaincy dinner of Queens University hosted by Father Raymond DeSoussa. In his speech he related what he considered the most powerful line written about the Polish pope, by French writer André Frossard:

***“This Pope does not come from Poland. He comes from Galilee.”***

One event in his papacy embodied this truth in a vivid way. Back on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1981 the Turkish gun man Ali Agca attempted to assassinate the Holy Father as he greeted the crowds in St. Peter’s Square late that afternoon. On December 27<sup>th</sup> 1983 the Pope then went to celebrate Mass in the Rebibbia Prison and to meet personally with Ali Agca where he forgave him for what he had done two and a half years earlier. Sadly it seems that Agca was not able to receive into his heart the meaning of this forgiveness. According to George Weigel in his biography of Pope John Paul II *Witness to Hope*:

***“Agca, for his part, described the Vatican as the “greatest of criminals” and said that the Church had offered him a huge sum of money and a cardinal’s red hat if he converted to Catholicism.”***

I use this story as a clear depiction of how Pope St John Paul was a Pope who because he was from Galilee so embodied in his life the Easter Gospel. For it is clear in reading the Easter Gospels that two themes reoccur. The first is that Jesus shows the apostles his wounds and secondly he declares to them forgiveness in the word “Peace” or “Shalom”.

The wounds of Jesus are shown for a very clear and important reason. He wants his disciples and us to know what sin has done. Jesus went to the Cross because the world resisted him. It is important to remember that Jesus did not just die, he was put to death. And practically everyone around him resisted him and contributed to his death. Here was God’s own self in human form, a portrait of Yahweh sprung to life. Therefore the resistance to him is the surest sign of our sin. The surest indication of our spiritual dysfunction. Nobody after the cross can say “you’re okay and I’m okay.” We know from the very wounds of Jesus that we are off kilter. They mirror back to us our need for grace.

But then comes that word, that haunting word spoken from the lips of Jesus and therefore spoken from the lips of God himself. “Shalom, Peace.” Our English translation barely captures the range of its meaning. Shalom in Hebrew intends something like complete flourishing, life, joy, goodness and fulfillment. Shalom represents everything Yahweh wanted for his people from the beginning. It is what the entire biblical revelation is meant to convey. And it is because of this understanding that we have five readings from the Old Testament at the Easter Vigil. We are to

understand the culmination of this Shalom is declared by the empty tomb of Easter. What the prophets and the patriarchs wanted the people to experience, what the Ten Commandments and all the covenants were about is Shalom.

What is the Easter Message? Even though we are sinners and the wounds of Christ prove it, even though we are hopeless in our hatred and our stupidity, and the wounds of Christ prove it. Even though we had gone and would still go today to the limits of killing God's own son, God still loves us. God still forgives us. That is why we know in the words of Romans 8 "that nothing can separate us from the love of God." We hear in the Shalom of the risen Jesus that any and every sin can be forgiven.

When we do see the connection between the wounds and forgiveness this carries a spiritual power that is transformative in the souls of those who receive this Easter Good News. Tonight for you Donna, Rachel, Austin and Zane, you will be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Then with Harold, who will be received in the fullness of the Catholic Church, you will confirm your faith in the One whose wounds can result in your peace. And with us you will fully process the Christian faith within the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church embodied so clearly in the life of Pope St John Paul II.

It was because Pope St. John Paul II so clearly understood this that he was the Pope who came from Galilee and Poland. His whole papacy was an expression of how the wounds of sin inflicted by the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century could not silence the Resurrection declaration of Shalom-Peace.

There was, many centuries earlier, another man, who although originally from Tarsus, and was vehemently opposed to the Galilean Carpenter came to see that all of those who come under his grace are to then find their own identity in his wounds and forgiveness.

He puts this so succinctly in Romans 6 for there, St. Paul says that our true home is Galilee because it is the man from Galilee, Jesus, who shapes our true and eternal identity and destiny. Repeatedly in this reading there is the juxtaposition between the death and wounds of Jesus and the resurrection and shalom of Jesus. Listen again to part of it.

***For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus***

We are no longer enslaved by sin when we allow the Shalom of the Lord Jesus to speak into our hearts. The life of sin has been destroyed and has been exchanged by the life of Grace. We know

that this is the spiritual power that governs the world because Christ has been raised, never to die again. When St. Paul says we are to consider ourselves dead to sin he means by this that it is the Peace of Christ that is to now govern and rule us. A peace that allows us to say that although we are from Calgary our true homes are Galilee.

It is when this Gospel becomes for us the bedrock truth of our lives that we can be used by God to do what all saints in the making do, proclaim Shalom to others. In doing this we know that there will be some who resist this grace and others who will respond with a yes to this Easter Good News.

St John Paul II pray for us so that like you we may live as people from Galilee knowing that the wounds caused by sin give way to the peace caused by resurrection grace.