

Homily for July 4th 2020

The Gospel of Peace

One person armed with the Gospel of peace can change the world. St. Telemachus did. He was a monk who lived in the 4th century. He felt God saying to him, "Go to Rome." He was in a cloistered monastery but he put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome. When he arrived in the city, people were thronging in the streets. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus. He thought to himself, "Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment?" He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, "Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar" and he thought, "this isn't right." He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, and tried to stop them. The crowd became enraged and stoned the peacemaker to death.

When the Christian Emperor of Rome, Honorius, heard about the monk he declared him a Christian martyr and put an end to the games. It's believed the year of St. Telemachus' death was 391 and the last gladiatorial fight 13 years later in 404.

Peace is something that is hard to come by in a world like this. However, it is a quality that is repeatedly described in the Scriptures that inspired St. Telemachus to take the action he did.

In today's Psalm we have one of the most vivid expressions of peace in the Old Testament:

***Mercy and faithfulness will meet;
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹***

Mercy is the compassionate love of God shown to us most fully in the person of Jesus. Faithfulness is the character of the person who is steadfast and dependable in displaying mercy to others. When these two attributes meet, we then read that righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Righteousness is the ordering of our lives according to the purposes of God and peace is righteousness' beloved companion. The psalm goes on to declare:

***¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from heaven. ²***

Two of the words from our previous verse are mentioned again. Faithfulness we can say is like the flowers and righteousness the rain and sunshine giving life to the garden. In the Old

¹ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ps 85:10). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

² [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ps 85:11). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Testament we discover that peace is the blessing resulting from living faithfully to one's covenant with God.

Our Old Testament reading from Amos gives to us a vivid image of what peace looks like. Indeed this is how the Prophetic Book ends:

***“Yes indeed, it won’t be long now.” GOD’s Decree.
“Things are going to happen so fast your head will swim, one thing fast on the heels of the other. You won’t be able to keep up. Everything will be happening at once—and everywhere you look, blessings! Blessings like wine pouring off the mountains and hills. I’ll make everything right again for my people Israel:***

***“They’ll rebuild their ruined cities.
They’ll plant vineyards and drink good wine.
They’ll work their gardens and eat fresh vegetables.
And I’ll plant them, plant them on their own land.
They’ll never again be uprooted from the land I’ve given them.”***

GOD, your God, says so.³

This is the language of a sacred poet who imagines a world where righteousness and peace do kiss. St. Augustine in the City of God captured succinctly what is expressed poetically by Amos when he said:

Peace is “tranquility of order”⁴

In a world where we no longer have gladiator games but other media that so glamorize violence and death – something that our fallen nature seems to desire – may we be inspired to further establish here at St. Peter’s and in our homes and communities a kind of faithfulness that does spring up from the ground and the righteousness that does look down from heaven.

³ Peterson, E. H. (2005). [*The Message: the Bible in contemporary language*](#) (Am 9:13–15). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

⁴ City of God 19:13