

Advent Peace

(December 11th 2005)

Text: Philippians 4:9-10

We have all heard that great prayer of St. Francis,
"Lord, make us instruments of Your Peace?"

If some of the greeting cards you will receive this year are anything like mine, their respondent message will do little to reinforce this great prayer of St. Francis. Bright candles burning brightly, Un-trampled snowy forests, quiet rural villages. These pictures may convey a soothing sense of tranquility. It is also possible to have a great sense of peace while sitting in a quiet church, or watching the sunset, or maybe listening to a piece of music. But the card with the tranquil views - or the music or quiet church have very little to do with God's peace that came to earth in Jesus Christ.

To fully grasp God's vision of peace, we need to go back all the way to the beginning of our family history. The first book of the Bible - Genesis, this book holds before us the image of peace once enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Genesis declares that human beings, in God's eyes possess a value - and a responsibility far beyond all other living things, it continues to show human history getting underway. Marriage begins here. Even in that state of perfection Adam feels loneliness and desire, and God provides a woman. Adam is set in a role of authority over all animals and plants. This was a time when humans talked daily with God, enjoyed friendship with God and one another and wonderful harmony in their environment. Throughout history, artists have tried to re-create in words and images what a perfect and peaceful world would look like, a world of love and beauty, a world without suffering or shame, a world of peace. For a time in Genesis, peace reigns. When God looks at all He has made, and declares it, "Very good". And He pronounces creation now complete. We may ask, 'Why at this time of Advent we are called to look more closely at the meaning of Peace? As we move toward Christmas, ancient Israel's vision of Peace with its precious images is anchored for us, in a little child in a manger. This child of Bethlehem comes into our world without a sword or earthly power. He intends to conquer through His own rejection and defeat. This weakness of God reveals a strength we cannot fathom. But it is so secure that its only weapon is love; and its only purpose is to establish Peace.

Advent prepares us to embrace this Child, God's gift of peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. Israel's word for peace is Shalom. Shalom is a powerful word. It encompasses the new

relationship we have with God through this Child Jesus, this young Child's weakness is much greater than our strength. How better could God display lordship over a peace-less creation than by becoming a little child? It takes a helpless infant to assure us that God's way to peace is through willing love and joyful obedience to God.

Our salvation comes from someone small, tender and vulnerable, some one hardly noticeable. God, who is the Creator of the Universe, comes to us in smallness, weakness and hiddenness. In the natural course of events we do not have peace with God. We can be estranged and alienated from God, because of our sins. The problem of our broken relationship with God is so serious that it could only be solved by Christ's death on the cross.

In the weakness of His suffering service, Christ inaugurated the peaceable kingdom where no one will hurt or destroy . Everyone will seek to serve the neighbour's good. Between then and now we pray daily.. Your kingdom come! When our love and obedience are finally fused into one, then the kingdom of God's peace will have come fully. Between then and now, we have to look from the crib to the Cross.

Are these images and this vision of peace more than romantic day dreaming? Not if we take time to reflect again on God's gift of Jesus, a gift dearly purchased by the death of the Prince of Peace. And when we embrace God's gift, we are powered to practice Shalom with everyone, everywhere.

In the passage we heard from Philipians .Paul wrote: whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have heard and received - and the God of peace will be with you.

I want us to take a moment to think about these verses by having us consider what is a common failure in many of our lives, but one we seldom recognize. It's the problem of a pessimistic outlook or negative imagination. How often do we find our whole attitude is set in a wrong direction by our imagining what could or would or even might happen in a situation, so that when you actually come to it you are so frustrated and flustered by what you have been thinking that you are out of shape and unable to handle the problem.

This is a subject that books on the power of positive thinking are written, but positive thinking needs to be put it in its proper relationship. There is a place for positive thinking, but only after you have first discovered the positive life, 'The Life Of Christ'.

There is a story about a man who had a flat tire on the way home, and found he had no jack in his car. He set out to borrow one in the wee small hours of the night, and he began to worry about the reaction he might get when he requested his neighbor for a jack. He had to waken him and get him out of bed in the middle of the night. He began to think about how that neighbor would feel, how angry and resentful he would be, and how he wouldn't want to get up and give him the jack, - that he probably couldn't find it in the garage anyway and he'd have to dig around and maybe get a flashlight and go to an awful lot of trouble. The longer he thought about it the madder he got. Finally he arrived at the neighbor's house, went up and thundered on the door and when the man showed up he said, "Well, you can keep your damned jack if that's the way you feel about it."

That unfortunately illustrates a problem that too frequently occurs in our lives. It's because we give no heed to the apostle's exhortation.

Paul says: Whatever is true. True means not false or unreliable, but genuine and real.. Psalm 119: vs. 142 Your righteousness is everlasting righteousness, and Your law is the truth. Vs. 160: John 18: Jesus said, 'I came into the world to testify to the truth.' The sum of God's word is truth. That's the first reality. Things as they are, not as they might be or could be.

Whatever is just - to be just means to be righteous, both toward God and man. In Matthew 5: Jesus said: 'You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I Jesus say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' - Justice punishes evil, crime, and wrongdoing. Mercy forgives them. One of the hardest things we can do is forgive someone who has wronged us. But it is only through experiencing forgiveness that one can clearly see God's great gift of salvation. Our justice and mercy may be just what someone needs to be ushered into God's kingdom.

Whatever is pure - pure refers to the high moral character of a person's life. John 17: Jesus says: 'Sanctify them, - make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. - we grow in Christlikeness - by constantly learning the truths of the Bible, and living them. Whatever is gracious: Psalm 84: says.. He God gives us grace and glory. No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who do what is right. Grace begins with God and is freely given by God. His graciousness to us is our example for extending grace and mercy to others. If there is any excellence. Excellence is related to reputation. It makes you a great role model. God places great value on excellence and instills in each of us special gifts, to be used to His glory. Excellence can engage

and challenge us; and it urges us to make a unique contribution. if there is anything worthy of praise.

If something is praiseworthy it deserves to be commended. In the book of Hebrews ch. 13: Let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of His name. When we share the good news of Jesus Christ we are offering Him a sacrifice of praise. Think about these things. This is a deliberate choice of the will to refuse to think about the negative, but to think about the positive in any situation, or about any person.

When you do, you are following the example of the apostle Paul. Then there is that cable, that powerful force which alone can make this possible, on which we are to take a strong grip. Then the God of peace will be with you. If you set your mind to that, the God who dwells within will express himself in terms of peace rather than strife and confusion.

You see Christianity was meant for life. I am impressed by the fact that when our Lord Jesus came he didn't talk to people about religion. He talked to them about life. About their work in the kitchen or shop, about how they lived and thought acted, about what they said to their children, to each other, and how they got along with their neighbors. He came to talk to them about the way they were living, and to show them what life is. That the secret is a person who dwells within, whose life may be manifested in terms of our personalities, and that everything is designed to drive us back to Jesus. Life is not like Time magazine, divided up into sections, a page for politics, a page for religion, a page for social life. It's all intermingled, one unit. When religion is nothing more than the pouring out of pious platitudes, theological pablum, it has no appeal to people. But when we hear words like these that speak life to our own hearts in the midst of the busy demands of our days we have something that ministers to the cry for adequacy. True peace cannot come from non-peaceful sources. God is the fountainhead of peace. Do not expect to find peace in a turbulent world until you make peace with the God of peace through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Peace with God is finding harmony with God, and that we cannot do on our own. In Jesus Christ we have the superlative answer to every obstacle and demand, every pressure laid upon us.

We must reconcile our selves to God. And Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have heard and seen

in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Prayer: Our Holy Father, we are so aware of the failure in our lives to express the indwelling life of our Lord Jesus. Yet we thank You for each failure, that from it we may learn how we need fully and continually to rest upon the one who is adequate. The one who can be gracious in us, and loving to the unlovely, kind to the selfish and ungrateful. Lord, we thank You for this is what you have been to us first of all. We pray that the manifestation of it may abound in our lives, that in this world turning from morality, wandering in the dark paths of evil, there may be light shining in dark places, manifesting the continuing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, so they may be drawn unto you. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.