

In the last few weeks, we have been reading our Lord's words to his disciples in the Upper Room on the night of his betrayal. Our Gospel reading this morning brings us to the end of his discourse. Jesus sums up all he has told them by saying that he has said all these things that they might have peace. *33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.*

Surely this causes us to want to pay close attention to what he says, because we all want peace. We need peace of mind if we are going to see clearly to do God's will each day and to stay on mission, and not be distracted by all the troubles of this world. Well, let us be encouraged, our Lord wants us to have peace as well. And that we might have peace, he tells us how we may have it. He informs us and gives us things to believe and act upon.

He primarily speaks of three things,

1. our access to the Heavenly Father in prayer,
 2. the assurance we can have of the love of the Heavenly Father,
- and
3. his compassion on our weakness, especially the weakness of our faith.
- Knowing these things, and living in the light of them by faith, is the path of peace, however troubling the times may be. How is this so? Well, let us consider them.

First, let's hear what he says about our access to the Father in prayer. Jesus gives us a remarkable promise. Not remarkable because he had not given this kind of promise before, but the promise itself is so remarkable. He says that whatsoever we ask the Father in his name, he will give it to us. The word whatsoever is a more than just broad, it's universal, isn't it. It includes anything and everything we could possibly think to ask him about. The only thing that Jesus says which indicates any limitation on what we might ask is that we are to ask in his name. That's the qualifier. What does it mean?

To pray in Jesus' name is certainly to pray on the basis of his mediation. We can only appear before our holy Father through the person and work of Christ. But to pray in Jesus' name is not only to pray through his merit, it is to pray in his interest. After all, it would be rather ludicrous to come into God's presence in Jesus' name and then ask God for something

you know is silly or frivolous or even wrong. The best way to be sure that you are asking something that would be in the interest of Jesus is to love Jesus. When you love him, you will care about the things he cares about and you can be confident your prayers will be “in his name.”

So, is there *anything* which you, or the church lacks that you are troubled about, that disturbs your peace? Jesus gives us a promise that our Father will provide, if we ask in his name. And note: we must ask. To have the peace that Jesus gives us, we must do more than just know we can pray in his name. He wants us to ask. It is in the asking in his name that we find the assurance our hearts need. It is as we take the time to pray and ask what we need that the Holy Spirit assures our faith in the promise of Jesus and thus we find peace.

Having spoken to us about our access to the Father that can bring us peace, Jesus goes on to assure us of the Father’s love for us. It is as if Jesus is telling his disciples that, when he does return to his Father, they shouldn’t think he’s going to be in heaven having to talk God the Father into loving them. The Father already loves them. After all, doesn’t John say that God so loved the world that he gave us his Son? Yes; Jesus is his gift to us, and we are his gift to Jesus, not only because he loves his Son, but because he loves us too.

It is very interesting to note the word that John uses for Jesus’ description of the Father’s love. If you have read the book by C. S. Lewis entitled *The Four Loves*, you will know that, in the original Greek language of the New Testament, there are several different words for love. We often think of the love God has for us as represented by the word “agape,” which often carries with it the idea of unconditionality. We see God loving sinners who in no way deserve his love and so we realise that he must love us without any kind of cause or reason in us for loving us. That’s how we understand agape. This is true and it is a wonderful thing. But the word used here in John 16 is not agape. It is “phileo”. It’s the same word in the name Philadelphia, which means city of brotherly love. Phileo is a friendly kind of love. It is a word we would use to talk about the kind of happy relationship between people who like one another; the kind of love we have in a loving family, for instance. Well, this is what Jesus is saying. He’s saying he doesn’t have to get God to listen to your prayers, because He

already likes you – you are in his family and he’s glad about it. His affection for you is not a mere decision on his part, but he appreciates how you love his Son, Jesus. He likes it that you believe he is who he says he is. Of course, he has loved us unconditionally, but he loves us in this way too.

Doesn’t that warm your heart? Doesn’t this understanding of God’s love for you bring peace to you and encouragement that he wants to hear your prayers and answer them? Well, you should feel that way, because that’s what Jesus said he wants us to feel about these things. He has told us these things that in him we might have peace.

He has told us:

1. we can use his name to give us access to the Heavenly Father in prayer,
 2. he has assured us that we have God’s ear because he already loves us,
- And finally he demonstrates his mercy on our faith when it is weak.

After the disciples told Jesus how they believed in him, he told them that he knew that their faith, though it was real, was still quite weak. He told them that he knew they would be afraid and forsake him.

29, His disciples said unto him, ... 30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things... by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. 31 Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? 32 Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone....

Jesus understood them better than they understood themselves. Jesus warned his disciples in the garden to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, because he knew their faith was weak. They slept instead, missing the strengthening of faith they needed and, as Jesus foretold, they forsook him. But does Jesus condemn them for being weak? Never. He keeps what we call “the big picture” in perspective. When he told his disciples in the Upper Room that they would forsake him, he told them – remarkably - to be of good cheer. Why? He already saw his victory before him. He told them that he had overcome the world. Whatever opposition they might face to being faithful in the future, he would take care of it. He would see them through.

We all know what it is like for our faith to fail. When it does, we feel like the Lord condemns us because we condemn ourselves. It may indeed be

that our faith has been weak because we have not watched and prayed. We have not done what the Lord told us to do, just like the disciples did not do what he told them to do that night in the garden. If we have sinned, we must repent. But let us be careful to remember that our Lord looks at our lives from the standpoint of his victory, which is the ground of our final victory. He does not expect our faith to be perfect. Nor is his victory in our lives dependent on our faith being perfect. Christ has had mercy upon us. He wins our victories for us, in spite of the weakness of our faith.

As we face whatever challenges this world throws at us, let us remember that our success in doing the will of God on this earth is not dependent on how strong our faith is. It is based on the victory of Christ on our behalf. Our focus is not on our faith; our focus is on our victorious King. He has overcome the world and all it may do to discourage us.

Therefore, let us be of good cheer. We have access to the Father in Jesus' name, we have the Father's love to comfort us, we have a wonderful Saviour who has already overcome all the world can do to discourage us. Let us therefore be of good cheer. Let us be at peace and – importantly - be at peace for the sake of the world. The people around us need to see the reality of the presence of the Prince of Peace in our lives, especially in these days when so many people are being made afraid. Jesus is risen, he lives indeed, and he gives his peace – and infinitely more - to all who will believe in him. Let us therefore *ask* the Father, in Jesus's name, for the grace to be his ambassador's of peace in these disturbing days. Amen.