



Peter's Reinstatement, Flemish School, UK National Trust

The Gospel reading this morning from John 15 begins with Jesus begging his disciples to “abide in His love” (see Jn.15:9). This sense of abiding in The Lord, and the Lord abiding in us, how beautiful; how powerful! If I could just have this presence in me, the constant, powerful, joyful, peace-giving presence of The Lord, why, I could truly confront just about any challenge that this world has to throw at me. If I could just have the abiding presence of The Lord indwelling in me, come what may, then yes, I could actually live the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, to let God make me an instrument of His peace. If I had the abiding presence of the Lord dwelling constantly in me, I could truly be an instrument of God’s peace. Sadly, I

sometimes don’t feel the presence of God’s infinite peace that passes all understanding. And it is in those times that I tend to fly off the handle and lose my cool, even hurt those I love, or am supposed to lead.

So, how do I get there, Lord? How do I get to be that person who has such a powerful and constant presence of you dwelling in me, that I can become an instrument of your peace in a hurting world, even in times of deep emotional stress? How do I get there, Father? That’s a question I have been dealing with this week. And God, who is unfailingly faithful, has chosen this week to send some specific Bible verses my way from the Lectionary for the 6th Sunday after Easter. Isn’t it amazing how God’s timing is always perfect!

The Gospel for today has one of the most critical verses of the whole Bible. Jesus has already given us the formula in Jn. 13:34, and now he repeats and reinforces this new commandment in John 15:12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...that you love one another **as I have loved you.**”

Unfortunately, what’s going on here in the original Greek of John’s account gets a little lost in translation. Because when Jesus says, “love one another” the love he is using is different from any love that had existed in the universe until this point in time. Because the love that Jesus is talking about here is “*agape*” love. This was not “*eros*” love, that wonderful intimacy that can and should exist between husband and wife. This was not “*storge*” love, the Greek word that signified that loving affection that can and should exist between parent and child.

This was not even “*phileo*” love, that “brotherly love,” that genuine endearment and respect that can and should exist between friends, when we have deep regard for the welfare of each other. No, this love that Jesus commanded His followers to have for the world – this love was *agape* love, a love so strong, a love so powerful that the person involved feels a joy, a sense of absolute joy and fulfillment from giving of yourself to those around him; even when it means placing yourself at the very bottom of the list; even if it means making sure that everyone else at the banquet of life is served a heaping portion of joy, before you then serve yourself and sit down at the feast. And you do this because of the joy that you feel deep down in your soul that comes from knowing that you have been a faithful child of God. You do this for the sake of *agape* love, so that your joy may be complete. That’s what *agape* love is.

OK, Father, I get it. I’m a graduate of Seminary. I know the Greek. But knowing what it means and living it out in my life, well that’s two different things. I know the meaning of the word, now how do I get to truly know The Word, the peace of Jesus, as such a constant force in my life that I can really put myself at the bottom of the list, even when life and it’s fears, and tears, and sleepless nights comes my way and blurs the vision of your lovely face?

How do I get back to that amazing plateau of truly green pastures in which everything can be laid down, both myself and my fears, and the scars of past experience, scars which have etched so deeply into my person the lessons I long to unlearn, lessons of being hurt, and betrayed, and having to rely on my own wits when nobody else was coming to my rescue?

How do I get back to my place of peace, Lord, in really trusting you so much that my armor of faith is so strong, so well knit together that Satan's pricks of doubt and resentment and anger cannot penetrate my person and poison my peace? How do I return to that bliss of knowing deeply how greatly I am loved by you and so many others. How do I get back there Jesus?

Well, James, this peace, it has to come with tears. This agape love was the reason for my friend Peter's tears by the lakeside, when I asked him three times, "Peter do you love me." And Peter kept saying "Yes Lord" but I just kept on asking. You see, I had to keep on asking.

Because you see, James, I was saying to my friend, "Peter, you have to learn first just how much I love you. Then, when you've finally received that light, even in the memories of the very darkest nights of your life, those wee hours of your past when the pain was so bad that you weren't sure you could hold out to see another sunrise - not even sure that you wanted to see another sunrise - if you can just let in my light, even to those places where the hurt is deepest, and the lessons of loss are so raw, if you can just let me enter those bleak, tightly closed backrooms of your soul, I will teach you how greatly you are loved. And when you have drunk your fill of that fountain, and learned how dear you are to me, you will be able to love my love, and love all the way I have commanded.

But, Lord, what happens when I get it wrong? What happens when my words and actions actually deny you entry and residence in the deep places of my heart. Because, Lord, **you know** how good I am at holding on to hurt. **You know** how much I'm apt to say, "Well, I'm not going down *that* road again, fool me once but not twice!" even if it's a road you want me to go down, even if it's a perceived threat you want me to confront, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit I can learn to meet it, and best it, and fling it from my shoulders so that it doesn't have dominion over me, this fear, and guarded, grudging view of others. What happens, Lord, when I get it wrong.

Well, James, that's what the tears by the lakeside were for. So, when you get it wrong, and say things in the heat of your human-ness that bely my presence in your heart, that's when the tears come in. And, after you've bled enough salt and water, you dry your eyes, you go to the ones you've hurt, you say, "I'm truly sorry." And then you lay that burden down. Because forgiveness is both given and received. So when you are truly sorry, then you can really lay your burdens down, and pick up in its place my mantle of peace.

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