

## BEING PEACEMAKERS: 14<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY C

Helen Keller is a famous woman. She was 20 months old when she lost her sight and hearing. Soon afterwards she lost her ability to speak as well. But through the patience of Annie Sullivan, her teacher, she learned to read and write in Braille. In 1904 she gained her Bachelor of Arts degree. Not long after, she began to write books and tour the world with inspiring and encouraging messages for deaf and blind people. One night after a lecture, someone asked her: *'If you could have one wish granted, what would it be?'* The questioner expected to hear her say: *'My wish would be to see and hear.'* But she answered: *'My wish would be for world peace.'*

Jesus would have applauded her answer. *'Happy are the peacemakers,'* he tells the crowds on the mountain, *'they are the children of God'* (Mt 5:9) In today's gospel we hear him say to his disciples and therefore to us: *'Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!"'* In harmony with this, you and I will shortly be reaching out to the people around us with our sincere wish: *'Peace be with you!'*

For both Helen Keller and Jesus, what peace means, and what the greeting of peace means, is what the Jewish people from way back have called *'shalom'*. For them *'shalom!'* was and still is the ordinary greeting. They don't say *'hello!'* *'good day!'* or *'hi!'*, they say *'shalom!'* They understand peace as a gift from God, whom they see as peace in person. In wishing peace to others they are wishing them perfect well-being. Such well-being comes from being in a right relationship with God and with our fellow human beings, a relationship we call *'communion'*.

For the Jews, God's gift of peace has included rain to make the crops grow, rich harvests of grain, freedom from enemies and wild beasts, and an experience of God dwelling among his people and binding himself to them in a covenant of love. But there can be no prosperity and well-being without justice. There can be no peace without the willingness to wish for others and to give to others what we Australians call a *'fair go'*. This reminds me of a connected saying of Indira Gandhi, one-time Prime Minister of India: *'You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.'*

Throughout the New Testament, references to peace (*shalom*) mean not just a state of inner peace and calm, but also a state of harmonious relations within the Christian community. This is what Paul means when he says again and again in his letters: *'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'* This is what your priest means when he greets you at the start of Mass with the words: *'Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...'*

But what is particularly important in the teaching of Jesus, is that we be people of peace and good will to everybody else, that we be peace-makers and not just peace-lovers. One Christmas morning in Northern Ireland, in the height of *'the troubles'*, a Catholic priest went

across the road to wish the minister and his congregation a happy Christmas. The minister received him warmly, returned his greeting, and later made a return visit. However, some elders of his church reacted with anger and took steps to have the minister removed from his parish. But those two church leaders were only doing what Jesus wanted them to do – to be instruments of peace, goodwill, friendship, hospitality and reconciliation in a troubled and divided society.

Being a person of peace and working for peace means welcoming not only those who are close to us, but also those who annoy us and disagree with us. To take the path of peace is to accept people as they are, with all their strengths, limits, and weaknesses.

We come to Mass to receive blessings from the Lord. If we took nothing else away with us from here today but peace, our time would be well spent. The end of Mass is not like the end of a football match or the end of a movie where we simply get up and go. At the end of Mass we are *sent out*. Having received the peace of Christ, we are then *sent out* as instruments and ambassadors of the peace of Christ to others.

But in order to keep on being people of peace ourselves, and in order to help break down the walls of rivalry, bigotry, hatred, prejudice, suspicion, fear, anger and bitterness among us, we need to keep on praying that amazing peace-prayer of St Francis of Assisi. So let us pray now:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much  
seek to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

*Amen.*

[bgleesoncp@gmail.com](mailto:bgleesoncp@gmail.com)