Pentecost “Spirituality of Sent and the Gift of Peace”
Fr. Frank Schuster

There is the Risen Jesus standing before the disciples. He shows them his wounds that no longer hurt, wounds that have the power to heal, and he says, “Peace be with you”. It is a remarkable image because there could be many adjectives to describe how the disciples were feeling after fleeing Jesus when he was arrested, mourning Jesus when he was crucified, and now in hiding for fear for their lives. There are many adjectives to describe how they must have been feeling. I don’t think peace was one of them. Jesus therefore appears to them and says, “Peace be with you”, a strange and wonderful greeting. Jesus continues, “As the Father sent me so I send you”. Jesus breathes on them, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit and now these disciples are apostles. The word apostle comes from the Greek word meaning “sent”.

You see, for the Gospel of John, there is a theology being articulated with the idea of being sent. A way of understanding this theology is that in antiquity, when a king sent an ambassador to a neighboring kingdom, that ambassador was expected to be treated just the same as if that king was there himself. If the ambassador was mistreated it would have been considered an act of war. Jesus is sent by the Father and so therefore the Father and the Son are one. The passion and death of Jesus, instead of causing a war between God and humanity, has instead become the very way God has chosen to redeem us and make peace with us. Jesus’ humanity is raised with his divinity on Easter Sunday. This means if we are united with Jesus in baptism and by the manner of our lives, our human nature becomes eternally united to Jesus’ divinity forever in the life of God.

This is how salvation happens in the Gospel of St. John. Jesus is sent to us by the Father and so Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus breathes on the disciples and gives them the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity who processes forth from the Father and the Son and the disciples are now apostles, a word that indicates that they are being sent. They are now apostles because just as the Son was sent by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is sent from the Father and the Son, the Apostles are now one with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are God’s ambassadors who are sent to save the world, nothing short of that. They are sent to save the world by welcoming believers into the inner life of God by the waters of baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

What is the characteristic of an ambassador of God? Jesus says, “Peace be with you”. The defining characteristic of a Christian sent by God is the gift of peace. I mention this because, I don’t know about you, but as I look around at the world today I don’t see a lot of peace, do you? As a country, as a species we don’t seem to know how to live in peace with family members, with neighbors, with fellow citizens, other countries, other religions or even our environment. There is a lot of hate and violence in this world as we see in the news all the time. And there is a lot of fear that we try to self-medicate away. As a result, nothing ever
seems to satisfy us, we want more and more, we litter the world with junk, and we become very jealous of people who have more than we do. The technologies we have developed over the years were sold to us as ways to make life easier so we wouldn’t have to work as hard, and the exact opposite has taken place. The more technology we have the busier we somehow find ourselves. We have become dissatisfied with anything less than instant gratification.

Our faith is so often the last thing on our minds. We have no time for God, for our prayers to God during the day, either by ourselves or with our families. How often do other activities become more important than going to Church, and how often do we stubbornly think about ourselves more than others, even the ones closest to us? We can go days forgetting to say “I love you” to the people in our families, let alone common courtesies like “please” and “thankyou”. It is all because we are not at peace inside of our hearts. We are not peaceful. We are not taking the time each day to simply be at peace. As a priest, I wonder how many relationships and lives have been destroyed because people simply forget how to be at peace? We have forgotten what it means to slow down, appreciate the world around us and the people in it, forgiving more and judging less, loving more and hating less, and simply being at peace.

And of course, the apostles understood this dynamic all too well. When Jesus appeared before the disciples, I can only imagine that being at peace was the furthest thought from their minds. They were fugitives in hiding from mobs that would love to imprison or kill them. If you ever think you are having a bad day, think about what their days were like. Jesus appeared before them, showed them his glorified wounds, and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you”. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, the Apostles are now one with Jesus and are therefore sent. You and I, by our baptism, confirmation, and reception of Holy Eucharist are one with God and the Apostolic Church. You and I are therefore also sent to proclaim the peace of Christ and the forgiveness of sins to those we meet.

This endeavor can only be successful if we ourselves accept the gift of peace that the Holy Spirit is offering us at Pentecost. This is because the defining characteristic of a Christian is a person who is peaceful in this very turbulent world which is all too often devoid of peace. We become peaceful when prayer becomes a priority over the endless tasks we perform, when forgiveness becomes a priority over the grudges we cling to, and when love becomes a priority over the hate either in our hearts or the hearts of others. On Pentecost, we recognize that peace in our hearts is impossible without the Holy Spirit. Only by the breath of the Holy Spirit can we know peace. And so we therefore pray for ourselves and for the Church and for the world, “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.”