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The Sunday After Ascension

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## The Peace That Passeth All Understanding

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you." This was the first verse of Scripture I remember my mother quoting to me.

We were not a family given to quoting Scripture, although I am sure I learned other passages of the Bible long before this, like the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third psalm and the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John.

This verse about *peace*, however, was the first I truly remembered, because when I heard it, it seemed to me like a shaft of warm sunlight pouring straight into my heart.

I did not understand it. Mine was only an *intuition* of what this peace might mean. And yet that intuition spoke quite clearly of favor and goodness and hope far more powerful than any adversity I had known.

No matter where we are in our Christian pilgrimage, the peace of God *speaks* to us. It is something *not of this world*, something that we have desired and hardly tasted.

And yet we seek the peace of God throughout our journey, even at times when we do not recognize it as such. Sometimes we feel an intimation of wholeness that we do not have, an inarticulate desire that we bring to prayer. In this sense peace is present by virtue of our need of it. And to fill our need, as St. Paul says, "the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." At other times the peace we seek in our journey is only a fragment of the real thing. We attempt to fill the void through an idea, a hobby, a learned skill, music, art, sport, each and all ways to find rest for our hearts, the fullness of which is found only in the peace of God.

And so it is that the three great festivals of the Church, which are approaching, help us to move deeper into this blessing of peace. The celebration of the Ascension of our Lord, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday abound with the peace "that passeth understanding."

With the Ascension of our Lord into heaven, the final peace of human nature is revealed. Jesus ascends, His body intact but conformed to the realm of Spirit. We learn from Jesus ascending to His Father that the totality of human experience is not destroyed in the presence of God but rather finds the culmination of happiness. There our Lord

continually intercedes for us that we may be made whole. As for now, we seek to be with Him in heart and mind, while we wait hopefully to join Him when history is rolled up like a garment.

The Ascension, then, following the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, is the crowning glory of salvation, and our dearest hope.

And so when we celebrate the Ascension we claim by faith the totality of human peace in which we possess the delight and favor of God. We do not understand it, but we begin to participate in its glory. It was this hope of glory that Jesus shared with Mary Magdalene, "I ascend unto *my* Father, and *your* Father; to *my* God, and *your* God."

Another offering of this peace comes with the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost God the Holy Spirit comes to the Church to fill her with divine gifts, especially the *flame of love*. He is the Comforter of every Christian, teaching, admonishing, bringing to our remembrance all that Jesus has taught us. Above all the Spirit pours forth the charity of God, the very same love that guided Jesus to the cross, to hold us close to Him. In this security of love we have the pledge of our peace to come. "Hereby we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit God is love and He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in Him."

On Trinity Sunday, we celebrate the completeness of peace. In His Triune life, both mysterious and personal, there is no end to happiness, and so there is no end to peace.

Trinity Sunday assures us that because God is personal, our peace to come is personal as well. And the culmination of happiness for us will be found in the perfect friendship of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Peace, then, ultimately, is the nature of God. When Jesus says that His peace is *not of this world*, He means that peace is *of God*, that the peace of the kingdom in which all the Angels and Saints share, derives from God. When Jesus desires to *return to the Father*, to take His humanity with Him into heaven, He returns to the glorious life that is His with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

These three festivals of the Church Year, Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday are all about the destiny of Man in peace. And surely that is where we begin.

From our first intuitions of peace until now, what we do not understand, and can never comprehend, *speaks* to us. It is a calling, an invitation, to enter into happiness. This unintelligible voice searches our hearts and minds, relentlessly, without ceasing, our entire life, beckoning us to draw closer and to move within the life of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is an invitation to come home. In Christ the voice becomes so much clearer and sure, even though in its depth it passes all understanding.

There, in the peace of God, we shall find ourselves His children, accepted and beloved, and we shall see in His providence what our particular intuitions of peace have always meant. As for now, rejoicing in the festivals of the next few weeks, we may pray this splendid collect. "O God of Peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest

we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength; By the might of Thy Spirit, lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that Thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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