

Peace be with you! An instruction that didn't help! I don't think that it would have helped me either. The disciples were meeting and suddenly, there was their friend Jesus, who they knew had died and may or may not have risen from the dead, according to what they had seen and heard. Now, here he was, appearing unexpectedly and saying **Peace be with you!**

They were scared and frightened. Maybe they thought that it was a ghost that they were seeing. Yet, that wasn't it. The Jesus that they saw with them was not a ghost: Jesus told them and showed them that he had flesh and bones. They gave him some broiled fish to eat. He ate it. I'm told that ghosts don't eat fish, but I must admit that I'm not entirely sure about this.

Without this and the other experiences that the disciples had, how could they all be sure of Christ's resurrection? Make no mistake! After the death of their leader, the disciples were scared and frightened. Yet after Christ was raised from the dead, they were still scared and frightened. But surely the fear that they felt after the resurrection was of a completely different type altogether!

Just at the moment, our Church's calendar is looking back to Christ's death and resurrection and forward to the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church. At this time, I don't think peace was foremost in the disciples' thoughts, as they were trying to make sense of what was happening to them. We have come to call this period "The Great 40 Days" but how great were they for the disciples?

After Pentecost, these dozen men were inspired by God's Holy Spirit and started what was to become the biggest change in direction that our planet has ever known. After

Peter had healed the beggar at Solomon's Colonnade, Peter gave the speech that we heard read to us, including the promise that times of refreshment may come from the Lord. My brothers and sisters, that is an encouragement to all of us. How many of us at times are in need of peace and refreshment? Our God can give us that peace, that special peace which comes from Him alone!

We celebrate Christ's peace by sharing it with each other before Communion: an opportunity to make our peace with anybody who we might have offended before we remember Christ's death and resurrection in the bread and wine of Eucharist.

At Pentecost, the Church with her message of Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Mankind was to start her journey of two thousand years, all around the world until she became the Church we have today. Over those two thousand years, there have been times when the light of the Gospel has shone very dimly indeed, but it has never been extinguished and never will be. There have been the most abhorrent and violent acts perpetrated in the name of Christ and his Church and in some parts of the world those acts continue to this day.

We are not perfect: there is nobody righteous, no, not even one of us. Yet we are here as sinners who have been forgiven. Did any of you ever see the car sticker that says *Christians aren't perfect - just forgiven?* There are none of us deserving of the riches that our God pours out to us through His Son and His Holy Spirit: in fact, we all deserve to be separated from God for eternity if we are judged by our own actions.

Yet instead, our loving God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place. God insists that the punishment for our wrongdoings must be death. The

sentence has been served, but not by us. Instead, God's own Son suffered our own punishment - God's own Son, dying a brutal death on the cross in place of us. That is what God's love is.

A story from a cricket game. This was a vivid picture at the time, and I am sure you will see it most weekends somewhere, but there was one time when it struck me. The batsman played the ball and called for the run. It seemed good, but one of the men in the outfield was quicker than either of them expected, and his throw to the wicket was right on. Now, one of the batsmen was weaker than the other, and as he saw what was happening, he ran as fast as he could so that he was run out, and so that his team-mate, handier with the bat, could carry on to make a good total. This is a picture of the message of St Paul in verse 7 of Romans 5, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die."

You won't hear many sports stories from me, but this one describes, in a way that I can start to understand, what it might mean for somebody to die for me. The same is true of the people who defuse bombs so that we might have a more peaceful time of it.

For ourselves, our most important work is to proclaim the message of the God of Peace wherever we find ourselves, whether it is here in the Hutt Valley or on the other side of our planet.

There are many things that Christ said to his followers while he was on the earth and there are so very many of them that we can take as inspiration. Surely one of the most encouraging phrases we hear is that most simple message from Christ's lips in today's Gospel reading:
Peace be with you!