

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 3rd 2022
A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called children of God

In today’s Gospel (Luke 10:1-12. 17-20) the Lord sent out seventy-two disciples in pairs to prepare the towns he was to visit. His instruction was more about practical example than about talk. Saint Francis is reputed to have advised the Brothers to preach at all times, sometimes using words. Actions speak more loudly than words. Pope Paul VI wrote about evangelization: “The first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life. People today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” What you are thunders so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying. The seventy-two disciples were instructed to give living witness to charity by their ability to work in pairs, and through mutual sharing and caring. Their belief in God’s care would be shown by trust in providence and in the kindness of people. Their gentleness would prepare the way for reconciliation and peace. On entering a house their first words would be, “Peace to this house.”

Blessed are the peacemakers

The present pope chose as his patron Francis of Assisi who based the Franciscan Rule on observing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. For Pope Francis, the eight beatitudes give us a portrait of the Master, and we are called to reflect that picture in our daily lives. He refers to the beatitudes as the identity card of a Christian. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

Working for peace is not confined to those who work at ending wars or in the pursuit of justice or famine relief. We are all called to be peacemakers. A hymn that is popular in charismatic groups is inspired by a line in today’s First Reading. “Peace is flowing like a river, flowing out through you and me: spreading out into the desert, setting all the captives free.” Peacemakers involve you and me. And there are there are many captives longing for peace and freedom.

Soul peace is the first step

Pope John XXIII, in his ground-breaking Encyclical Letter on peace outlined three steps towards peace: soul peace, home peace and world peace.

Becoming a maker of peace needs to be rooted in prayer which develops a powerful relationship with God. “Be still and know that I am God”. Jesus told the disciples to tell people that “The kingdom of God is very near to you.” Growth in prayer develops more awareness of the nearness of God, more trust in the power of God and more desire to share the love of God with others.

Home peace

A good place to start making peace is at home. The advice that Jesus gave his missionaries on entering a house was to wish peace to that family. “Peace to this house.”

What destroys peace at home? Excessive drinking, late hours, financial worries, insensitivity, bickering, arguments, lack of appreciation, no time for communication, no prayer. Being a slave to the social media is now recognised as seriously harmful to communication in the family. Saint Paul gave very good advice, “Never let the sun go down on your anger.” Family celebrations can be very helpful in bonding families. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” Being a maker of peace will not be easy because people might be a bit odd, uncooperative,

harbouring hurts from the past, demanding, locked up in themselves, beaten down by life or simply disinterested.

Dealing with conflict

How does one deal with conflict? There is a time to confront with courtesy and sensitivity but other times it is better to walk away because any confrontation will cause more divisions. Nobody wins an argument but each side is more entrenched in their position. In last Sunday's Gospel, when Jesus and the apostles met with hostility in Samaria, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven, but Jesus advised them to go away and shake off the very dust of the place. While there is a time to walk away there are other times when an approach can be made to resolve a conflict. Pope Francis calls it an art. "We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill" (*Rejoice in the Lord*, 89). Invite the Holy Spirit to kindle the fire of love in both parties. The advice of Jesus is to remind people that "The kingdom of God is very near to you."

Dialogue is better than fighting

Francis of Assisi offers a very Christian approach to making peace. He lived at the time of the Crusades when armies were sent out to the Holy Land to wrestle back control of the holy places from the Islamic army, sometimes known as the Saracens. Francis was very keen to end the violence of war and to establish peace. After two failed attempts, he eventually got there. While there was a lull in the fighting, he managed to cross over to the Saracen side at Damietta, and, to everybody's amazement he met with their leader, the Sultan. Each in his own way was a man of deep faith. They grew to respect each other, agreeing that unity is better than conflict. The Sultan is reputed to have said that if there were more Christians like Francis there would be no war. The respect that Francis had for the Sultan inspired the advice that he gave to the friars who would go among the Saracens as missionaries. They should not begin with arguments and disputes but to be subject to every human being for God's sake, to be servants rather than bosses, while letting it be known that they were Christians. Later, when the time was right, they would proclaim the word of God and explain the Christian belief. His method was to make a friend, be a friend and bring the friend to God. This is how peacemakers are children of God.

Prayer inspired by Saint Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow your love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and 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.