

# Our Lady and Saint Thomas of Hereford, Ilkeston with St John the Evangelist, Stapleford

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Peace Sunday, 2021

It is Thursday as I write this letter to you. It is snowing outside, which I always enjoy. It is settling a little but apart from a sense of peace, the snow also makes me thoughtful. This coming Sunday is Peace Sunday. I have posted Pope Francis' letter for the occasion on our parish website so you can read it in full, but I wanted to draw out a few of his thoughts for you.

Pope Francis writes of God the Creator as the source of our human vocation to care:

'The Book of Genesis shows from its very first pages the importance of care or protection in God's plan for humanity...In the biblical account of creation, God entrusts the garden "planted in Eden" (cf. Gen 2:8) to Adam's care, to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). This entails making the earth productive, while at the same time protecting it and preserving its capacity to support life.'

He highlights care in the ministry of Jesus:

'Jesus' life and ministry represent the supreme revelation of the Father's love for humanity (cf. Jn 3:16). In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus showed himself to be the one consecrated by the Lord and "sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Lk 4:18).'

And he reminds us (Do we need reminding?) that there was a culture of care in the life of Jesus' followers:

'The spiritual and corporal works of mercy were at the heart of charity as practised by the early Church. The first generation of Christians shared what they had, so ... (cf. Acts 4:34-35). They strove to make their community a welcoming home, concerned for every human need and ready to care for those most in need. It became customary to make voluntary offerings in order to feed the poor, bury the dead and care for orphans, the elderly and victims of disasters like shipwrecks.'

I realise that these are quite long extracts, but there is a critical interconnectedness with them. The first shows that God's gift to us from the beginning has been 'care' for others and for the world. The second quote reminds us that Jesus's ministry was one of love drawing us back to God the Father. The third illustrates that what we have received from God should flow out to others. This is the 'care' we are commanded to share. But I feel that we can only follow this command to 'care' successfully if we understand how deeply dependant it is on 'peace'.

In using this word 'peace' I do not mean an absence of anger, or hostility, or resentment, or covetousness, or gluttony, or violence. These are all aspects of peace, but they do not bring peace in themselves: they are the fruit of peace. You can discipline yourself into controlling your anger, or your gluttony – and this is all good – but it does not remove the ground that the enemy stands on.

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True peace can only be established – true care can only dominate our thoughts and actions - when we enter into the harmony of God's peace.

During the Mass, just before Holy Communion, I open my arms up towards you and say the words: '*Peace I leave you, my peace I give You.*' These are Christ's words from John's Gospel as he tells his disciples that he is going to leave them to go to His Father in Heaven. However, after these words of peace there is a very important declaration which we are supposed to know but I fear we have forgotten, and yet they are as fundamental as they are unsettling. They are: '(but) not (peace) as the world giveth, do I give unto you.' God's peace is not the world's peace, or rather peace as the world often perceives it. God's peace is the Trinitarian peace of Gods love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. THIS is the peace that we should be seeking to enter into, and yet how hard it is! But if we do not heed these words, then all our other attempts at peace with be tentative and evasive because they lack the true foundation of peace. We easily become mesmerised by our own deeds, and even the best intentioned, most earnest, and even for a time most successful of acts, becomes 'peace that the world gives' and not that God gives. They become like snow that gives way and melts before the heat of the earth.

We are called into the peace that God the Father enjoys with his only Begotten Son and with the Holy Spirit. If we understand this, then we can be drawn into it, and if we are drawn into it then we will become instruments of His peace. Peace Sunday then begins to mean much more than a call to do good deeds, or an unattainable ideal: it becomes a call to conversion in who we are, not merely what we do. And if we allow this to happen then truly we can begin to 'care'.

With prayers and best wishes for you and your loved ones,

Fr. Andrew