

Recently, on ABC radio, I heard a programme about modern-day children who suffer from a deep sense of anxiety. This anxiety affects them in relation to school or sport, or any activity where they don't feel they can live up to expectations. And of course it acutely affects their families as well.

We live in an age of anxiety & stress, which affects all of us to some degree. Even if we don't suffer in a severe way, all of us always need peace in our everyday lives.

Many of us have the hymn, *Dear Father, Lord of humankind* as one of our favorites. One of the verses goes like this,

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain & stress,
& let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.*

We live in a mad world of rush & bustle. Where do we find the *beauty of God's peace*?

At this stage in our church year, we are poised on the threshold of the Ascension, Ascension Day is on Thursday, with Pentecost Sunday not far off. The reading today from John's gospel is part of a long "love-letter" from Jesus to His disciples, in which He promises His friends that although the time has come for Him to depart, He will send the Holy Spirit to be their comforter & guide. He tells them He is going away, going back to His Father in heaven. Ascension is about Jesus'

Kingship over the Universe, returning back to His rightful place in heaven at the Father's side.

At the beginning of Chapter 14 in John's Gospel, Jesus has said to them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." Then later in the chapter He repeats, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, & do not let them be afraid." He is not going to leave them orphaned or abandoned; He is going to send them His Holy Spirit to be with them for ever; & He is going to give them His peace. He *promises* them His peace, the peace that passes all understanding, a precious gift for them, & for us too in this stressful world we live in.

What exactly is this peace? Jesus says it's not like the peace the world gives, which doesn't last very long. Some illustrations will help to understand what it is like. *There is a painting titled "Peace". It depicts waves crashing against the jagged rocks. It portrays the violence of a crushing storm. It seems anything but peaceful. But down in a small corner of the painting, tucked away in the rocks, is a little bird sitting on her nest, totally oblivious to the raging storm all around her. That is peace.*

The peace that Jesus gives is summed up in the Hebrew word *Shalom*, which means *peace, safety, fulfillment, wholeness. Shalom is right relationship with God.* The world is unable to give shalom, because it is about being at one with God & with our neighbour. It is inner peace, a deep sense of wholeness.

Picture a massive cyclone raging over the ocean. On the surface of the sea the violent winds whip the water into giant waves & create a scene of havoc & chaos. Yet, a mere eight metres below the surface, the waters are clear & calm. The fish there go on living their lives totally unconcerned by the thunderous tumult just above them. Where there is depth there is peace. So it is in the Christian life. A depth in our relationship with Jesus will bring us peace, especially in those times when we really need it.

Love & peace go hand-in-hand. Jesus promises that if we love Him & keep His word, He and the Father, through the Holy Spirit, will come to us & will make their home in us. It will be a home where love & peace are paramount, where there is a right relationship between the Father & Jesus & us, His disciples.

There are at least six ways we may obtain peace/shalom:

1. *Trust.* Commit our lives in simple trust to the Lord. When in a difficult situation, turn to the Lord in trust for His help.
2. *Forgiveness.* Make our peace with God by turning away from the wrong way & turning back to God. He will forgive us when we confess our sin.
3. *Obedience.* If we follow God's way for our lives, we will have a deep sense of peace.
4. *Forgiving others.* When we know God's forgiveness in our hearts, He can help us forgive others. This builds peaceful relationships with others.
5. *Worship.* When we gather together to worship the Lord, we find a peace between each other.

6. Lastly, *Guidance*. It can be difficult sometimes to know the right way, God's way, to move ahead. A verse I learnt in Sunday School many years ago often stands me in good stead. Proverbs 3.5,6: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart & do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him & He will direct your paths.*

To finish, I want to quote a Gaelic prayer of blessing, a prayer based on the quietness & peace we can find in nature. Let us pray.

*Deep peace of the running wave to you;
deep peace of the flowing air to you;
deep peace of the quiet earth to you;
deep peace of the shining stars to you;
deep peace of the gentle night to you;
moon & stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace to you. Amen*