

- Peace be with you. Our readings today focus us on Peace, the peace of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ
  - Isaiah uses beautiful imagery to speak of God’s kingdom of peace:  
*the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,  
the leopard lie down with the kid;  
the calf and the young lion together,  
with a little child to guide them.  
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,  
together their young shall rest;  
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.  
The baby shall play by the cobra’s den,  
and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair.  
There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;*
  - Isn’t this how we often think of Peace? An absence of war or conflict, a time of quiet inactivity?
  - Certainly that’s an aspect to it as we see from the prophet Isaiah. Even the natural violence in creation will be no more.
  - Certainly a lack of violence would be a start:
    - that all life would be valued at each stage;
    - that war in the Middle East and, indeed around the world would cease;
    - that persecution, discrimination, and violent opposition would cease;
    - that both people of color and police would not have to fear for their lives;
    - that bullies at whatever level would not dominate the scene;
    - Yes, a lack of violence would be a start.

- But God’s peace is far, far more than just the absence of violence.
  - I’m reading a book of meditations on the Cross of San Damiano in the Church of San Damiano in Assisi, Italy. It’s the cross God used to speak to Saint Francis.
    - In this reflection, the author writes of peace, not merely as an absence of violence, but peace as a force itself, a force, not of domination or brute strength, but a strong, driving force that leads to a “riot” of peace in myself and the other and in this world, a force that pushes beyond mere quiet to bring about tranquility, harmony, completeness.
    - St. Francis knew this force of peace as did Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. It wasn’t just turning the other cheek but brought out goodness in the other, respect for the other.
  - This is God’s peace. Indeed, we can also say that this force of peace is the very presence of God. It is *shalom*.
    - *Shalom* is peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility.
    - *Shalom* is right relationship with God that leads to harmony and my reaching out for the good of the other.
    - This is why Jews use this word as a greeting, both on coming together and on parting.
  - God’s peace, then, is the Spirit of God that Isaiah prophesied in our first reading, the Spirit that came alive in Jesus Christ, that was poured out on Christ at His Baptism and that we received at our own, that was sealed at confirmation.

- The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:  
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
a spirit of counsel and of strength,  
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,  
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.
- This Spirit helps us to discern the Will of God, to understand how God is speaking to us and calling us and this same Spirit then gives us strength and courage to act on that Will.
  - And it culminates in Fear of the Lord. Now Fear of the Lord is not what we usually think of when we hear the word “fear” as something to avoid, something which pushes away.
  - Here, Fear of the Lord is a recognition of who God is and how God works. It’s why John the Baptist says that he is not worthy to carry the sandals of Jesus.
  - Fear of the Lord allows us to recognize God’s great power given to us with God’s gentleness and love.
  - Notice how well this resonates with the seasons of Advent and Christmas. God does not come as KING OF THE WORLD but instead comes in the smallness of a baby.
  - God does not want to frighten us or force us. God wants us to be at peace with His Presence among us, a present that unites us into His Body.
- This is precisely Saint Paul can call us to think in harmony, to glorify God with one voice, to welcome one another as Christ welcomed us.
  - It is not **my** spirit, or **my** will or what **I** wanton more than it is merely the absence of violence
  - God’s peace, God’s Spirit calls me beyond myself, calls me into something bigger, making me part of the Body of Christ.

- And it is this same Spirit that calls me to reach out and give to others the precious gift I have received.
  - It is because we have received this Spirit, that we can know the peace of God, that we can go and make disciples.
  - It is in this way that we can help to bring about the justice and righteousness of God’s kingdom, to wear the band of justice and the belt of faithfulness, to be attuned to being just and respectful of one another even as we are faithful to the who calls us.
  - Some will ask “What good can it do?” “How can the little I offer make any difference?” But again, we see the humble, small way that God inserts Himself into the world, the way that one candles begins to dispel the darkness.
  - Even and especially when it is difficult we need to trust in this Spirit, to look for this peace and act of God’s love.
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- One of the heroes of Advent that we meet in today’s Gospel, John the Baptist, shows us how to receive and to share this Spirit, God’s peace.
    - First, by his own example, he shows us that we need some pace to know God’s peace. He went off by himself in the desert, wore camel’s hair (before it was fashionable) and ate locusts. Nothing would distract him from placing himself at God’s disposal so he could know that peace and allow it to flow through him.
    - Indeed, God’s love and peace flow through John as forgiveness of sins, as conversion of heart, transformation of lives for those who come to him to be baptized. And he baptizes without distinction.

- Well, ALMOST without distinction. Anyone who comes truly looking for that peace, seeking the love of God and forgiveness of sins, John is happy to share the love and mercy and PEACE of the Father. But to those who come thinking they have everything together, that they (and only they) are saved, that they are better than everybody else, John sends the “brood of vipers” packing.
- Advent is the season of expectant waiting for the Lord who comes and seeks to give us peace, not merely **for** us, but **through** us **for the world**.
  - This is why we need to create the space during Advent, that like John, we may come to know God’s peace and to share that peace with others, especially as love and mercy.
  - A number of you have asked me about my resolution to do away with screen time. I wasn’t perfect but I only fell on my day off,
  - More than that, though, the evenings where I did keep that resolution, I found a sense of peace, a bit of breathing room. I must admit that there were times when I pined for the TV or Facebook which only made me realize how dependent on can become distraction, how difficult achieving a space for peace can be. But when we do, even a small space, WOW, what a blessing.
- I encourage you, then in the days ahead, even with all there is to do, to make the space for God to give you that peace. I know it is difficult but as the commercial used to say, “TRY IT! You’ll like it!”
- Peace, be with you.