

**Homily for the Second Sunday of Easter
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and Consecrated Religious; my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Gospel readings for the Second and Third Sundays of Easter tell us that when our Risen Lord appeared to His disciples, His message to them was, “Peace be with you.” Today, on the Second Sunday of Easter, the Gospel according to Saint John tells us that the disciples were behind locked doors because they were afraid. Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.” Thomas the Apostle was not with the others on that occasion, but a week later his disciples were again inside and this time Thomas was with them. Once again, Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19-31).

Next week, on the Third Sunday of Easter, the Gospel according to Saint Luke will tell us that the Risen Lord appeared to the disciples, stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you" (Lk 24:35-48).

In light of this greeting of peace that our Risen Lord repeatedly proclaims, it is good to recall Saint Luke's description of the announcement of the birth of Jesus, when the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to those on whom His favor rests" (Luke 2:14). Indeed, this proclamation of peace on earth that we hear at Christmastime is fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ that we celebrate during the Easter season. While secular culture gives more attention to Christmas, the more important celebration from a religious perspective is Easter, since Christmas would merely be the birthday of a great man if He had not risen from the dead. Christmas gains its glory from the fact that its true significance is fulfilled in the resurrection of Our Savior, the Prince of Peace.

"Peace" is a beautiful word, but what does it really mean? The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, said, "Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it

be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice. Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice. . . . This peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and peoples and their dignity, as well as the studied practice of brotherhood are absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide. That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbor symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father. For by the cross the incarnate Son, the prince of peace reconciled all men with God" (GS 78).

The Twentieth Century was ravaged by two World Wars. Our nation was also involved in wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. With all the scientific and technological advances that now surround us, it would not have been unreasonable to have hoped that the Twenty-first Century would move people beyond the barbarities of war to a more

civilized world. Sadly, however, the wars currently raging between Russia and Ukraine as well as between Hamas and Israel in Gaza are stark and gruesome reminders that true peace remains painfully elusive.

A cease-fire or truce in these wars would not be true peace, which is the ultimate goal. A temporary cessation of violence and the silencing of weapons will not bring about real peace as long as hatreds and hostilities remain between enemies.

The description of the first Christians in the Acts of the Apostles tells us that the “community of believers was of one heart and mind” as “the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:32-35). The early Christian community had a very simple yet profound understanding of the model and teachings of Jesus. The mission of the early apostles, including Paul, to spread the Good News was effective in its focus and outreach. Communities of believers sprang up, founded on the work and teachings of Jesus. The spirit of generosity and shared resources was strong in these communities.

The kingdom of God is a place of peace, and Jesus invites the disciples into that place. This kingdom is “at hand,” within us, and it is a source of strength for the journey. Like the first disciples, our mission as

Christians sends us out into the world to spread the Good News of Christ's peace. It is belief in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that leads to the building up of a community that lives in peace because it shares one mind and one heart.

May God give us this grace. Amen.