

At Peace or Peaceful?



To be 'at peace' or to be 'peaceful', like the possum pictured above, may seem the same, but it can be quite different. We can move through anxiety and stress, and still be 'at peace' interiorly, trusting God to embrace us with God's peace. On the other hand, we may try to be peaceful by physically blocking out the world like possum has done, (above right), by covering his eyes with his bushy tail.

Each Sunday at the Eucharist, we, as gathered Christians, are reminded, "We are the body of Christ", and we reply, "His Spirit is with us." Next we receive the greeting, "The peace of the Lord be always with you." To which we respond, "And also with you." God's peace is given to us as individuals, and also as members of Christ's body. We come together not just to be strengthened by the food we receive at the Lord's table, but to be given God's peace which is to be shared among us. This is why 'the peace' is often passed between members of the congregation by acknowledging one another as fellow children of God. It is a short but important part of the service, reaffirming our relationship with God and one another. The "peace of the Lord" we receive, as Jesus demonstrated, is not living without a care in the world, avoiding all people and things we dislike or sleeping soundly every night. Rather it is knowing deep within us, that God is with us and loving us no matter what happens to us or what challenges, expected and unexpected, confront us.

If we look at the life of Jesus on earth, he was a person 'at peace', but he did not avoid difficulties. Instead, like us, he wept at times in grief, became tired and stressed, and prayed to his Father for help. In the end, on the cross and in great pain he was still 'at peace', not wanting to punish those responsible for his crucifixion, but thinking of the needs of others such as his mother, Mary, (John 19:26-7), and the man dying beside him, (Luke 23:43). Even in such a place, Jesus offered inner peace to others.

In John's Gospel chapter 20, we find the risen Jesus continually greeting his distressed disciples on the evening of the day of his resurrection with the words, "Peace be with you." It was God's peace that could overcome the grief, fear and perhaps guilt which raged in the minds of the disciples at that time, and replace it with joy. Jesus had conquered death, and now the disciples were being given peace and strengthened with the new life of the Holy Spirit to go out and proclaim the good news of forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal resurrection life to all.

But such peace offered by God, must be accepted, and developed by us in relationships. In my last leaflet I mentioned how, by making friends with others who have different views from us, we can enable peace and love to begin to emerge in and through our relationships with them.

As we grow in such friendships, we discover we can disagree without antagonism or fierce arguments. We learn to really listen to the other, respect their perspective and try to understand what they say and do. In this way, a reconciliation can be achieved that does not need agreement.

Although today Australia and Japan have a good relationship, it has not always been so. Many people in Australia could not bear the Japanese during and immediately after WW2 because of the horrific and criminal way they treated Australian prisoners of war, and civilians caught up in the war. My mother, a trained nurse, was one of these people. She despised all Japanese people. A friend of hers, also a nurse, was on a hospital ship which the Japanese sank in 1942. The nurses on board who managed to reach shore on nearby Baka island in Indonesia, were gathered together by the Japanese soldiers and made to walk back into the sea and were shot. Only one nurse survived.

Some years after the war, my mother was asked to give hospitality to a

Christian Japanese theological student for his holidays. It was a hard decision for her to make, but in the end she agreed. Gradually reconciliation and healing came through in a friendship which developed between the young man and my mother. They began to enjoy one another's company and even laugh together. This friendship lasted many years.

You may not be confronted by such a dramatic situation, but we can all find ourselves at times with people we wish to avoid, or erecting barriers to prevent them from coming close to us. In those situations we might remind ourselves that God's gift to us of peace, is to be shared with *all* the people we meet. We can do this by accepting them as God's creation, appreciating them as they are, being willing to forgive and be forgiven, and offering to them our friendship.

May we all desire to be 'at peace', and to cultivate and share God's peace with others by building bridges, and not barriers that only produce an anxious peacefulness.

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