

**Sixth Sunday of Easter – Year C**  
**(May 5, 2013)**

**Peace I Leave You**

Jesus says in the Gospel, “Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.” And I’ve been asking myself, “What does he mean?” What is this peace that Jesus is talking about? And what do we mean when we turn to one another before we come for communion and wish one another “The peace of Christ.”

Shalom, peace, is a common Jewish greeting. In Jesus time, it would be normal for Jews to say Shalom to each other the way we say Hello. And from all I can gather from what I have read and heard Shalom can mean a lot of things. Shalom doesn’t simply mean the absence of war, although that could be part of it. More than that it means I wish you well; I wish you health and happiness; I wish you wholeness, the fullness of life. I wish you freedom from anxiety and freedom from fear. “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid,” Jesus says. That’s all part of Shalom.

You remember Jesus’s first word to his disciples after his resurrection. He said, “Shalom,” peace, and he repeats it three times within a very few verses. The risen Jesus brings peace to this discouraged, despairing group of people who had put their hopes and trust in him and that had all seemed to have been destroyed with his death on Calvary. But now he is with them, alive, and wishing them, Peace. It’s all right. Don’t worry. Don’t be afraid.

Jesus says, “My peace I give you.” Peace is a gift. All we have to do is accept it. And that’s important. It calls for a response on our part. And apparently it isn’t always easy to accept God’s gift of peace. In reflecting on God’s gift and our response, I thought of Fr. Horace McKenna. You have all heard of Fr. McKenna. Our parish hall is named for him. I thought of him because the anniversary of his death occurs this week and also because he seems to me to have been a person who accepted God’s gift of peace. Fr. Horace McKenna dedicated his life to serving God by working for the poor. In doing this he faced many difficulties. He even had his life threatened when he integrated a church in Southern Maryland. I had the privilege of

living with him for some years when he was a parish priest at St. Aloysius Church. At one time Fr. McKenna was allowing a homeless man to sleep in his car at night because he had nowhere else to go. One morning when Fr. McKenna went to get his car he could not find it. It had disappeared during the night. Later it was found abandoned in Virginia. It turned out that the homeless man had stolen it. He was caught and arrested but when the police asked Father McKenna about pressing charges, he refused to do it and he astounded the police by simply saying, "He probably needed the car more than I did." I thought of Jesus forgiving sinners. And in light of our Gospel today, I thought of the peace that Jesus offers and that Horace had obviously accepted. He could remain calm, unruffled, even seeing God somehow at work in this incident which would have upset most of us pretty seriously. Horace did difficult things for the poor, but he always did them cheerfully. Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." That's what the gift of peace is all about.

We often sing, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." Horace McKenna did good and wonderful things for many people. And He did those things not just because he had accepted Christ's gift of peace, but also because he heard what Jesus said in last Sunday's Gospel, "Love one another as I have loved you." As I have loved you. Jesus died for love of us. What a wonderful world this would be if just those of us who call ourselves Christians could love one another as Jesus loved us. I think love and peace go together. Peace can come on earth and it can begin with me, if, indeed, I can love all God's people as Jesus loved me. Let's think and pray about that for a few minutes. Think especially of what you are saying and what you mean when you turn to your neighbor in a few minutes to wish him or her the peace of Christ.