

4.19.26
3rd Sunday in Easter
Fr. Tom Lucas, S.J.

I have spent many of the last days since Easter teetering between despair and anger. Not a lot of paschal alleluias.

On Easter our nation's supreme leader made this written statement: "Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the F----- Strait, you crazy (blank), or you'll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah." He promised that an entire civilization could and would be erased overnight if it did not bend immediately to his will. His minions promised to rain down "Death and destruction from the sky. All day long," saying "This was never meant to be a fair fight, and it is not a fair fight, we are punching them when they're down, which is exactly how it should be.

On Saturday, April 11, Pope Leo stood 15 yards from the tomb of St. Peter, and there he made a reasoned, heartfelt prayer for peace, which is published in full in last weekend's bulletin and on our website. I entreat you to read every word of it.

The response to Pope Leo's reasoned, heartfelt prayer to follow the ways of the Prince of Peace was not surprising: he was vilified and insulted by our leader who resembles the Emperor Nero in every detail. Ignorant, unlettered politicians claimed that the Vicar of Christ has no understanding of the scriptures nor of the living tradition of Just War that Leo's own St. Augustine had created 1500 years ago.

In this joyous Eastertide, death, destruction and then utterly blasphemous images—there is no other word for them—mock Jesus the Healer, Jesus the Prince of Peace.

What a perverse moment this is, when the Holy Father is condemned for preaching the Gospel of Christ, when the New Testament of Peace and the new covenant of love that

he revealed are cast aside in favor of the Old Testament's covenant of merciless, retributive justice.

I ask myself what is there to do? Do I meet anger with anger, hatred with hatred? Violence with violence? Incivility with incivility?

Today's second reading from the first letter of Peter provides me with some difficult but helpful counsel: "conduct yourself with reverence during the time of your sojourning, realizing that you were ransomed from your ancestors' futile conduct, ransomed not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ."

Admit who you are, a stranger in a strange land, and keep walking forward.

Listen again:

Now, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus. While they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?, the things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel..."

Listen again to Peter in The Acts of the Apostles, Peter who would be condemned to death by Nero: *"Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs; this man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it."*

And Jesus said to them on the road:

"How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over."

So he went in to stay with them.

So there it is, the beginning of the answer to so many difficult questions. The simplest of all prayers:

Stay with us.

Do not let us fall into the temptation of hatred or vengeance; help us forgive as you forgave; stay with us and give us courage to witness to the truth.

Help us to understand again that your way to Resurrection passed over the hill of Calvary, and before your ascent there, you broke the bread and shared the cup with us, the bread of life and the cup of blessing.

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" And are not our hearts burning too?

Jesus was condemned by Pilate and the High Priests

Peter was condemned by Nero

Leo is vilified by the rulers of this world.

Yet the Gospel remains; the Beatitudes remain; the truth of the law of love remains; The open, wounded heart and hands of Christ remain; and still we are sharers in the mystery of this table where we recognize him in the breaking of the bread and find strength in him for the journey.