

Epiphany 4/a: 1/29/17  
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*May the peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Savior: and the blessing  
of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and  
the Holy Spirit, be among us, and remain with us always. Amen.*

No doubt about it, when you look around the world today  
it's hard to see much peace.  
And yet we just stood and prayed with straight faces for just that:  
*God's peace in our time.*

It's right there in the Collect of the Day,  
the prayer that sets the stage for the day's readings;  
it "collects", if you will, the themes for the occasion.

Today's was outrageous enough to bear repeating.  
Shall we pray it again?  
"Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven  
and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in  
our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives  
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.  
Amen."

Beautiful, beautiful words.  
But are they *true*?  
Is God's peace in our time even possible?

A widely quoted variation of this phrase was used by  
British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain back in 1938.  
Upon signing the Munich Agreement with Nazi Germany,

he claimed to have achieved “peace for our time.”  
You don’t have to be much of a history buff to know  
how that turned out.

Poland was invaded months later,  
followed shortly thereafter by the bombing blitz of London.  
So much for “peace for our time”.

But did you notice the key word missing from Chamberlain’s phrase?  
That’s right – all the emphasis is on our time, our human capacities.  
And God knows that’ll only get you so far.

On the other end of the spectrum,  
we could just give up altogether;  
resign ourselves to the violence and injustices of this life and  
wait for God to make it all better in the next life.

As enticing as this may seem sometimes, there’s just one problem:  
It’s not Biblical.

All of today’s readings make this clear,  
with the prophet Micah asking pointedly --  
“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice,  
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

In other words: You. Do something. With God.  
Not suggested, but “required”.

Which brings us back to today’s Collect.  
For praying *is* doing something with God.  
Prayer opens our eyes and our hearts to see God’s peace in our time,  
despite all signs to the contrary.  
It gets our hands and feet moving to *be* God’s peace in our time.

Whenever one child of God reaches out

to befriend and defend another  
from the taunts of a playground bully,  
that's God's peace in our time.

Whenever a young person seeks the help they deserve  
instead of inflicting violence upon themselves  
through drugs or eating disorders or self-mutilation,  
that's God's peace in our time.

Whenever a battered woman or man musters the courage to leave  
an abusive relationship,  
that's God's peace in our time.

Whenever we forgive someone who has wronged us,  
or ask forgiveness of those we have wronged –  
it ain't easy, but it's God's peace in our time.

Whenever we show our patriotism not only by waving flags,  
but by defending the principles on which  
this country of immigrants was built –  
freedom, of religion and of the press, among others –  
that's God's peace in our time.

We see God's peace in our time when we remember  
that our ultimate allegiance is to the kingdom of heaven  
whose citizens Jesus describes in the Beatitudes.

Most of all, we see God's peace for ALL time  
in the cross of Christ Jesus.

As St. Paul reminds us in today's reading from I Corinthians,  
we preach Christ crucified  
which may appear foolish and weak to the powers of this world  
but is in fact far wiser and stronger

than they could ever imagine.

For in his life, death and resurrection,

Christ Jesus reconciles all peoples and nations, all creation, with God.

Christ is our peace, who breaks down the dividing walls between us  
(as St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians).

Christ gives us that peace which passes all understanding,  
and grants us the vision to see –

*and to pray and work for – God's peace in our time.*

Blessed indeed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Pray that we be so blessed in our time.

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