Blessed are the Peace Makers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

“(μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοὶ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ νῦν θεοὶ κληθήσονται)” (Mt 5:9).

Peace derives its meaning and qualities within a framework. Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish or Buddhist will see peace differently, as will pacifist or internationalist. Socialist, fascist, and libertarian have different perspectives, as do power or idealistic theorists of international relations. In this diversity of meanings, peace is no different from such concepts as justice, freedom, equality, power, conflict, class, and, indeed, any other concept.

However, peace can mean negatively absence of or freedom from some disturbance. Positively peace can be seen as tranquility or serenity internally and externally.

‘Shalom’ (שלום):

The Hebrew root ‘SLM’ means “to be complete” or “to be sound.” This verb conveys both a dynamic and a static meaning “to be complete or whole” or “to live well.” As a noun shalom (שלום) means: (1) wholeness of life or body (i.e., health); (2) right relationship or harmony between two parties or people, often established by a covenant (Num 25:12-13; Is 54:10; Eze 34:25-26); (3) prosperity, success, or fulfillment (Lev 26:3-9); and (4) victory over one’s enemies or absence of war.

Its significance is thus not limited to the political domain — to the absence of war and enmity — or to the social — to the absence of quarrel and strife. It ranges over several spheres and can refer in different contexts to bounteous physical conditions, to a moral value, and, ultimately, to a cosmic principle and divine attribute.

True biblical shalom refers to an inward sense of completeness or wholeness. Although it can describe the absence of war, a majority of biblical references refer to an inner completeness and tranquility. Shalom is a blessing, a manifestation of divine grace.

‘Eirene’ (εἰρήνη):

In classic Greek, peace is the state of law and order that gives rise to the blessing of prosperity. But, the New Testament use of ‘Eirene’ (εἰρήνη) remains firmly based in the Hebrew traditions of shalom in the Old Testament. ‘Eirene’ means; (1) right relationship with God; (2) Good relationship among people; (3) an individual virtue of tranquility or serenity; (4) the absence of war and (5) a greeting formula.

The significance of the word ‘peacemakers’ (οἱ εἰρηνοποιοὶ) is more than ‘peaceable’ (εἰρηνικός, Jas 3:17) or ‘peace with’ (εἰρηνεύοντες, Rom 12:18; Mk 9:50). Making peace is the peaceable character consciously exerted outside itself.

Children of God (υἱοὶ θεοῦ):

The word used here is ‘sons’ (υἱοὶ) not ‘children’ (πρόκλα). Christ’s reference is not so much to the nature as to the privileges involved in sonship. Child denotes the life brought into being between God and the believer through the new birth (Jn 1:12-13) whereas son points out to the similarity of character existent between believers and God (Mt 5:44-45). Being his children, they are his heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.
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Pastoral Application:
When Jesus Christ came to earth the angels announced that there would be peace. Jesus is called the, ‘Prince of Peace.’ “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Lk 2:14). After his resurrection, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:19).

Considering Jesus’ words, “If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you” (Mt 10:13), two important saying of Jesus on peace are analyzed here for better understanding.

My peace … Not as the world gives:
“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” (Jn 14:27)

In Oriental greetings at partings and dismissals Shalom (Peace of soul or Prosperity) was wished (1 Sam 1:17; Lk 7:50; Lk 8:48; Acts 16:36). “Peace I bequeath to you” said Jesus. Instead of uttering a mere wish He turned it into a bequest.

When Jesus added ‘The peace that is mine I give to you,’ the word ‘My’ is emphatic. Leaving them His work, His view of life, His Spirit, He necessarily left them His peace.

Peace of Jesus is different from that of the world. His manner of giving was real, sincere, neither formal nor hypocritical (like the world). He gave what was His own, what He might have kept, what had cost Him a life of suffering and a cruel death to bestow, what was open to friend and foe alike, who have nothing of their own to give in return.

Not peace but the sword:
“Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword.” (Mt 10:34).

Sword is a metaphor for conflict. Conflict was not Jesus’ purpose, but it arises naturally from people as they respond positively or negatively to Jesus and his teachings. From the observance of Gospel values and Jesus’ precepts, divisions would come, even between the nearest relatives.

Sword means threshold or decision point. Some Biblical examples are light (Jn 3:19-21), sign of contradiction (Lk 2:34), the net (Mt 13:47-48) and the unknown day and hour (Mt 24:40-41).

John the Evangelist says, “And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God” (Jn 3:19-21).