

Father Philip's Address to St Paul's Assembly

Thursday 19th September, 2013

PEACE

This Saturday is the United Nations International Day of Peace. In a few moments we will hear about how Saint Paul's College will be represented by 28 of our students at the local celebration of this on Saturday.

Before we do hear about that, I would like you to consider for a moment what true Peace is:

It is often said that peace is the 'absence of war'. In fact the Cambridge Dictionary describes it as 'freedom from war and violence'.

If we are happy with that understanding of peace, then it is very easy for us to look at the world and agree where there is peace and where there is not peace.

Here in Hong Kong, we could reasonably say that we live in 'Peace'. We are not involved in a war and violence is certainly not rampant on our streets.

The images of Syria and the continued high level of security in Afghanistan could lead us to the reasoned conclusion that they are countries which are not experiencing peace.

It becomes a fairly clear and easy task, with the aid of newspapers and media reports to make the black and white decisions on where there is peace and where there is not. There are some grey areas, which if we are not sure probably by definition are not at peace.

As you can see, it is fairly simple to decide ... if we believe that peace is an absence of something.

But a Christian understanding of peace is not something which is a vacuum, it is not a void, it is not an absence.

Instead, peace is an active thing, something which is real and tangible, we can experience it, see it and feel it.

Dr Martin Luther King Junior said that “Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal.”¹

If peace is a ‘means by which we arrive’ at our goal, then Peace does exist as something, rather than being the presence of nothing.

When I celebrate the Eucharist here, the prayer I say when we ‘share the peace’ says:

“Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will.”

Jesus said “my peace I give you.”²

He is not giving us an ‘absence’ of something, instead he is giving us something that is real and active. His is not an empty gift, but something that he hands on to us.

So a dictionary understanding of Peace may be an absence of war or violence.

But a Christian understanding of Peace is that it is something in itself, it is a gift which leads us to the full state of experiencing peace. That takes work to accomplish. As Dr King expressed, it is not just the goal, it is also what we do to achieve that goal.

So as we approach Saturday and the International Day of Peace I am sure we will see continued reports of war and violence, just like we do every day. However, remember that the peace we hope and pray for is one which takes work. But even as we begin to experience that peace, it still takes work to maintain.

It is with great interest that we now have the opportunity to hear of the celebration which will be taking place on Saturday.

¹ Dr Martin Luther King, Jr – The Casualties of the War in Vietnam, February 25th, 1967 – The National Institute, Los Angeles http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king02.html

² John 14:27