

If you could have what you want most in life, what would you ask for? This question was once posed in a survey and the most common answer was surprisingly not money, power, or even love. The most common answer was peace. If you think about it, we all yearn for peace in every aspect of our lives. We want peace in our marriages, our families, our workplaces, our country, and in our world.

Yet, we're surrounded by broken marriages, divided families, hatred, rebellion, financial anxiety, and an unsettled country. The news is filled with reports of unrest and violence. All of the evil and injustice can appear overwhelming. There just doesn't seem to be a lot of peace in the world. In an era that has seen monumental advances in science and technology, peace proves to be elusive.

But it's not just us in our time. Chronic conflict and contention have been rampant throughout history. I read a startling statistic. It said that since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than 8% of the time. That means that over the last 4,000 years of human history, only 268 years saw peace.

But that doesn't stop our culture from promising us solutions to our quest for peace – drugs, alcohol, material goods, and 24-hour entertainment. You name it. The list is endless and it's constantly changing. We're told that we'll finally find peace when we satisfy our desire for pleasure, self-gratification, or comfort. We buy into these promises and spend a lot of time and effort trying to chase down peace this way. We're deceived into thinking that peace is merely the absence of trouble.

The prophet Micah tells us that it's a futile endeavor to try to find peace in the things of this world. We can search and search but we'll never find peace in a place, or a possession, or an experience. But peace isn't an abstract idea or a beautiful theory. It's real and there's four little

words at the end of our first reading that unlock the secret to finding it. It says, “He shall be peace.” It doesn’t say, “He shall bring peace.” It says, “He shall be peace.” Micah prophesied more than 700 years before the first Christmas that peace would come in the form of a person. And we’ll celebrate His arrival in just a couple of days. True peace can only be found in Jesus Christ – the Prince of Peace.

On our own, peace isn’t possible. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes said that human life is nasty, brutish, and short. If we don’t look at life through the lens of Christ, Hobbes is right. But with Jesus, nothing is impossible. He’s the promise of ultimate peace – not a guarantee of carefree security during this life but something so much deeper, true inner peace. The things of this world can’t give us the peace He gives us. We’ll hear Father say these words of Jesus from Saint John’s Gospel in just a few minutes before we share a sign of peace with each other, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Now we don’t get to hear the next line from scripture. But, it goes, “Not as the world gives do I give it to you.”

When we come to know Jesus Christ, His person, His message, and His mission, we find peace in God’s plan for our lives. Even though sin has turned this fallen world into a valley of suffering and tears, even though evil often seems to be victorious over good and injustice often seems to triumph over justice, we can look at the baby Jesus lying in the manger with confidence and hope. We know that God is at work in the world, slowly setting things right. The Good Shepherd is gently guiding the course of history, leading His children to the green pastures of true wisdom, lasting joy, and eternal life. Knowing this brings interior peace, even amidst the exterior storms.

With this knowledge, struggles and sufferings can’t shake our peace in Christ. It’s a peace that goes deeper than the stormy circumstances all around us. If we put our faith in this

message, like Mary in today's Gospel, we too will be called blessed. But Mary didn't just believe in God's plan for her life. She put her life in His hands. She acted upon it. She said yes to God's invitation. In fact, her yes was the full expression of her faith.

Amidst all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, we too have a chance to give our faith in God its full expression. We're called to not only enjoy the peace of Christ but to spread it. We're called to be visible signs – living, breathing billboards – of Christ's peace. He doesn't want us to be idle spectators and hoard His peace. He wants us to be active partners in spreading His everlasting peace.

We discussed in our Catholicism 101 class last week how we can bring people who don't know Jesus into a relationship with Him and how we can bring the people that do know Christ into a deeper relationship. The simple answer is living out the peace we have been given in Christ. We can talk until we're blue in the face but the best way to bring others to Christ is through our actions. Saint Francis once said, "Preach the Gospel always, when necessary use words."

Christmastime can be stressful with last minute shopping and getting together with the family. We can live out the peace that we have found in Jesus by how we treat the check-out clerks, how we behave in the crowded parking lots, the patience we show our visiting relatives, and taking time to reach out to the less fortunate. Others should look at the joy and peace we have found in Jesus Christ and want what we have.

Brothers and sisters, when we come to Communion and receive Christ inside of us, we carry Him with us in a special way, just like Mary. She set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth. We have the opportunity to take Christ outside these doors to everyone we meet. People should be

able to see the peace of Christ in us. It may seem like a daunting task but we're not alone. He's with us.

At the end of Mass, I get to do the dismissal. There are a few options but I almost always choose, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." Our response is, "Thanks be to God." Today, as we leave Mass. Let's really mean it. Thanks be to God that we have received His peace and now we get take it out into the world through the example of our lives.