

July 7, 2013 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
Comfort, Peace, Confidence

Last week I spent some time at an interreligious program of prayer and bible study. A Lutheran bishop, Bishop Lohrmann, offered many a fine insight on the scriptures. One view which we clearly share with him is that we pay special heed to last words. It can be words of someone on a death bed, or words in a graduation speech, or words before moving to some distant place.

The particular Scripture that Bp Lohrmann brought to our attention was the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

There Jesus' last words to the Apostles were:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,
 baptizing them in the name of the Father,
 and of the Son and of the holy Spirit,
 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
 And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Those final words of Jesus have had a tremendous impact on the Apostles and their successors.

Missionaries have gone to the ends of the earth to preach and baptize.
 Christians have enjoyed great **confidence** in Jesus because he said that he
 would be with always. **Confidence!** Always!

Confidence. That is not a word that typically we use in a religious sense.

However, it might well be!

The very root of the word means “with faith”, or “with trust”.

So, final words ... what an interesting coincidence in today's Scriptures.

In today's readings we have the ends of two different books of the Bible.

First, we have the end of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians,

a book that we have been reading at Masses for these last five Sundays.

Second, we also have a part of the last chapter of Isaiah, one of the prophetic books.

This prophecy is near the end of the Israelites' captivity in Babylon.

Since we usually expect something special, important or profound in “last words”,
 so, what are the messages we find in these two readings.

In Isaiah we hear the words of God encouraging the captive Israelites before they return to their homeland.

God compares the return to Israel to the joy of an infant nursing in its mother's arms.

God promises the Israelites "... that you may nurse with delight..."

Perhaps you have seen that joy of an infant while a mom was feeding.

Perhaps it was your own brother or sister ... perhaps your very own infant.

God continues the words of encouragement.

"As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap;

As a mother **comforts** her child, so I will comfort you;

In Jerusalem you shall find your **comfort**."

Again, can you picture that?

Can you possibly remember recall **comforting** a child in your lap?

The **comfort** of being in mom's lap;

Secure; no fears; safe;

being **comforted** about anything gone wrong in young life.

Confident in mom; **comforted**.

God promised to be like that with the Israelites ... and it continues with us.

That image is so strong.

One of the speakers last week reported such an interesting analogy that is sometimes attributed to Martin Luther.

According to one story, Luther had defined prayer as "climbing up into the lap of God.

Having a chat there in God's lap."

Perhaps that is a little foreign to us adults.

We tend to be so formal and sophisticated ... using prayers that have been written out by saintly people.

Can we become childlike? Less formal?

Speak to God about what is on hearts.

Confidently expecting a comforting response from God?

So from some Isaiah's final words

we get **confidence** (a **confidence** *in God*), and

we get **comfort** (a **comfort** *from God*).

How about St. Paul's last words to the Galatians?

Over the last few weeks St. Paul has been encouraging the Galatians to not let their differences tear apart the community.

Last week he provided the ultimate standard to live by, namely,

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Today’s reading reinforces the whole letter by simply saying:

“For neither does circumcision mean anything,

Nor does uncircumcision,

But only a new creation.” Or “a new creature.”

Circumcision is not the issue, says Paul.

No, the real issue is whether we have changed, become a new creature, a creature who is now more in tune with the Lord.

Don’t get caught up in petty squabbles ... follow Christ

Then St. Paul **consoles** the Galatians much like God did the Israelites in the reading from Isaiah.

Paul tells them:

“**Peace** and mercy be to all who follow this rule...”

Peace to those who follow Christ.

Then Paul ends with familiar sounding words:

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.
Amen”

From these first two readings three concepts seem to stick out for me.

The concepts seem to be almost woven together.

Confidence + Comfort + Peace

Having **confidence** in the Lord brings us **comfort** and even **peace**.

An image coming from my childhood comes to mind.

Do you remember weaving popsicle sticks together?

I can visualize six sticks, three going up and down, three going sideways.

[Show example using tongue depressors for the popsicle sticks]

The three vertical sticks are : **Confidence + Comfort + Peace**

The three horizontal sticks are: **Confidence + Comfort + Peace**

They all are woven together.

I would make the case that the starting concept is **Confidence** in God and then the two others, **Comfort** and **Peace**, get woven into the pattern.

How’s our **confidence** in the Lord?

Have we possibly prayed like this?

“Lord, I just don’t understand but I **trust** in your wisdom to help me get through this mess.”

“O Lord, why did he have to die so young? I have **confidence** that he is now with you and at peace.”



“Lord, this is a risky decision for me. Help me make the right choice. I **trust** in you regardless of the outcome.”

Several years ago one of our parish members was going to have some major surgery and was fearful about it.

Fr. Don prayed with her and anointed her in the Sacrament of the Healing.

She reported that felt **comforted**.

She felt at **peace** as she headed off for the surgery.

How about you?

Got **Comfort**?

Got **Peace**?

No? Try more **Confidence** in the Lord!

Today's Gospel is not about the last words though it does have some of Jesus' words right before he sends disciples on a mission.

Today's Gospel from St. Luke tells us how Jesus sent out 72 disciples to prepare the villagers for the coming of Jesus.

Just one chapter earlier Luke tells how the Lord sent out the 12 Apostles and now he is sending out six times as many!

72 disciples all going out to preach the Good News.

There's some **confidence** for you ...

enough **confidence** to go out to strangers, possibly even hostile strangers,

enough **confidence** to leave without money, without sandals, without a sack of supplies,

enough **confidence** to cast out demons.

And what did Jesus give them as their starting message?

They were to say: “Peace to this household.”

They were to cure the sick.

They were to say “The kingdom of God is at hand for you.”

And us?

How about we use some of that **confidence** we have in the Lord to spread the Good News with someone this week.

How about we use some of the **peace** we experience here today to bring **peace** to someone who is troubled this week.

How about we use some of the **comfort** we have received to **comfort** someone this week, maybe a child, maybe an elder, maybe a co-worker.

Confidence + Comfort + Peace! (1263 words)