



I love watching reunions of loved one who have been separated from one another for a long period of time. After the Vietnam War ended, the American prisoners of war were released from captivity. Some of these very brave men had been in prisoner of war camps for five and six years, had been tortured, and had no contact with their loved ones. There is one image I have of a soldier, coming down the stair of a plane on crutches. There is a crowd of military personnel and band ready to greet him. His family are behind a line, waiting to be allowed to greet their loved. Suddenly, they ignore all protocol and spontaneously run across the tarmac and surround the soldier in a wave of kisses and hugs, with tears following freely among them and all who witness such the scene. I can remember my days in the seminary, especially when I was just beginning, how I waited so anxiously for the visiting day when my family could come and see me. We love reunions.

Today, our Gospel, we have an incredibly moving moment. The apostles are locked in a room, probably the very room where they celebrated the last supper just a few nights before. The Gospel tells us that the doors are locked for fear of the authorities. These apostles of Jesus are terrified that the brutal death on the cross might await them. They are huddled in fear, filled with terror. They also bear a deep sorrow in their hearts. Jesus is dead. He has died a most violent and ugly death on the cross. Nails were pounded through his flesh, thorns pressed into his head, and lashes pounded on back. For three years they had followed him. His words had filled their hearts with delight. Over time, they became convinced he was the Messiah. They broke bread with him hundreds of times; they fished with him on the Sea of Galilee and heard him laugh at the great catch they had made. They drank wine with him at Cana, saw the glory of God shine through him on the Mount of the Transfiguration, and were stunned as Jesus called forth the dead man Lazarus from the tomb. Jesus had loved them like no one else had. They recalled the words, I no longer call you servants; no, you are now my friends. The memory of the Last supper filled their minds, but they could only weep in sorrow that the one who so loved them was dead. They were fearful heartbroken men clinging to one another with nowhere to go. They were lost.

Even worse was the painful aching guilt that filled their souls. They had run at the first moment that the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. After proclaiming that they would never abandon him, that they would die for him, that they would never deny him, they were lacked the courage to be with him. They ran and hid while he died on a cross with only his Mother Mary, a few faithful woman and the apostle there to offer him a look of love and compassion.

Fear is a terrible emotion to carry. It paralyzes us. Sadness weighs down the spirit and robs it of all energy and life. Oh, but guilt is the most powerful force of all. It was shame and guilt that once led our first parents to run and hide from God in the Garden of Eden. These men who once joyfully walked the dusty roads of the Galilee with Jesus who had called each of them by name and invited them to participate in the kingdom of God were now filled with self-hatred. They despised themselves for their failures and could barely look at one another. We have been to such places in our journey of life. So many of us carry a deep regret, a haunting painful memory, an unrequited love, a bitter divorce, a betrayal of a wedding vow, a resentment toward another that sees no possibility of forgiveness, a soft voice that says to us we lack faith, we do not truly love God, we are living a tepid spiritual life, disappointments about the faith life our child, the sins of our youth, a long-ago abortion, a sinful compulsion that we never overcome, an aching loneliness at the loss of a loved one. Most of bear our scar within ourselves and mask them well. The fear the apostles felt on that first Easter night, the sadness at the loss of a loved one, the guilt that plagues us and never seem to go away are as familiar to us the face we see in the mirror.

The first word that Risen Jesus speaks to the depressed and despairing apostles on that first Easter night, the words that the Risen Christ speaks to you and me today and every day is the gift and promise of the Resurrected Lord: *Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."*

Many of us know a word or two in languages beside English. We know merci is French for thank you, ciao is Italian for hello or goodbye, Nyet is Russian for no, and Hola is hello in Spanish. Mensch is Yiddish for a good and loving person. The Hebrew language has the beautiful word Shalom which is translated peace. Shalom can be used as a casual greeting hello or goodbye, but any Jewish linguist would tell you that the word has much more nuance and depth to than a simple greeting. Here is how one scholar defines the word Shalom: *Peace: to be safe, sound, healthy, perfect, complete [it signifies a sense of well-being and harmony both within and without - completeness, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony; the absence of agitation or discord, a state of calm without anxiety or stress. This is a word that is a powerful prayer and desire for another: wholeness, free from worry, a state of calm, harmony within and without.*

This is what Jesus seeks to bring to the apostles and all generations who will follow them in the way of the Lord. Shalom. I believe that we seek that peace, that soundness. When Pope Francis was asked to describe what image he would give for the Catholic Church, he responded: The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... My brothers and sisters today Jesus comes to me and you in the Eucharist and gives us his body and blood. Bring your wounds to him, your sins and sorrows, your worries and fears and let him say to you as he said 2000 years ago, Shalom. Peace be with you.

