

Second Sunday of Advent, 12-10-2017
Second Sunday of Advent Message Series on Peace – “A Peaceful Heart”

By Deacon Frank Easton

During this Advent Season, we are delivering a message series on Peace. This second week we are focusing on “A Peaceful Heart.”

It was a cold February evening as Christopher was driving his wife and children home. Suddenly, a car was speeding directly toward them. He unsuccessfully tried to maneuver out of the path of the oncoming car. The head-on collision claimed the lives of Christopher’s wife, their unborn child, his only daughter and one of his sons. Injured, but surviving the crash were Christopher, two of his sons and the driver of the other car. The driver of the other car was a 17 year-old boy. He was drunk; his name was Cameron.

If you or I were in Christopher’s shoes, how would we respond? And it’s not just tragic events that cause us hurt, pain, suffering, anger and anxiety. Our culture today continues to provide us with increasing challenges to a peaceful heart. In fact, some studies state that the United States has become the most anxious country in the world. So how are we to have “A Peaceful Heart?”

Years ago I heard a saying that I have repeated countless times, “Do your Best! Pray that it is Blessed! And leave the Rest to God!” In fact, I repeated it so often that my young daughters would often give a big “Amen” at the end or roll their eyes! The good news is, today as adults, I have heard them say it themselves! I repeat it often, not only to encourage my family to have a peaceful heart, but as a reminder and encouragement to myself as well. “Do your Best! Pray that it is Blessed! And leave the Rest to God!”

This saying starts with the understanding that we pray, that we have a relationship with God, with Jesus Christ. Personally, I have no clue how a person can have a peaceful heart living in this world without a prayer life, without a relationship with Jesus.

“Do your best!” We are called to “do our best” in the situation that is trying to rob us of a peaceful heart. Maybe bad choices have been made. We are called to “do our best” going forward! And doing our best may involve forgiving our self or others. Forgiveness is critical for a peaceful heart. In Mark’s gospel we heard John the Baptist telling us to acknowledge our need for God’s forgiveness. Truly acknowledging our sinfulness, knowing of our own need for forgiveness, helps remind us of our need to extend forgiveness to others. We are called to be loving and forgiving. As Christ has forgiven us, we are to forgive others...and our self...

Having done our best... we are called to “pray that it is blessed!” In other words, we are called to pray with great hope and expectation that God will bless our efforts, bless our situation. Our ultimate hope is in God!! In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear words of great hope. The people of Israel are being told that their days of exile are coming to an end. God will lead them back through the desert to their own

land. And they will not make the journey alone, God will journey with them. We too are called to place our hope in God as we face our struggles. A hope for a better tomorrow... our hope that comes from knowing that God is making the journey with us... with God all things are possible!

Lastly, "and leave the rest to God!" This statement calls us to submit to God. To humble ourselves before Him. In Mark's gospel we hear John the Baptist saying, "I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of His sandals." This is John the Baptist saying this. This is a man that many thought might be the Messiah. We too are called to humility! A humility that truly understands that all we have is a gift from God, that none of us are entitled to a perfect life. It is so easy to say that we know that we are not entitled! But do we really believe this? Too often we go through life expecting and thinking we deserve a good life, and sadly, we often desperately try to hold onto everything that is good. And when that doesn't work out, we quickly think of ourselves as victims. "Why me?" True humility calls us to understand that everything, absolutely everything is a gift. Instead of holding on tightly, we are called to humbly "leave the rest to God." "Do our Best! Pray that it is Blessed! And leave the Rest to God!"

Faced with the devastating loss of his dear wife and precious children, Christopher had a choice to make. Would he respond with anger and revenge? Or would he "do his best," extending love and forgiveness?

Three years prior to this tragedy, one of Christopher's sons nearly died from a serious illness. From then on, during Christopher's time of daily prayer and scripture, he would reflect on how everything is truly a gift from God. And each day he would pray, "Lord help me to appreciate my wife, my children and all of my loved ones. And if they are taken, in my opinion, prematurely, please give me the needed strength." Christopher was praying for the ability to "do his best" and for humility, for the ability to know that all is gift and to hold everything loosely. "Leaving the rest to God...."

Even though his loss was very real and painful, Christopher was praying for the ability to do his best, hanging onto His hope in God, knowing that better days would be ahead and that he would once again see his wife and kids in paradise. Humbly believing that all is gift, he resisted the victim mentality and thanked God for the time he did have with his family. He continued to thank God for his two precious surviving sons. And knowing of his need for Christ's forgiveness in his own life, Christopher forgave Cameron, the boy who had needlessly caused the deadly crash.

Christopher visited Cameron many times while he was in jail and after he was released. He shared with Cameron the incredible pain, hurt and suffering that he caused. Christopher also made it very clear that he forgave him and encouraged him to forgive himself with the help of Jesus Christ. Christopher's commitment to living with a peaceful heart helped bring peace to his two sons, to Cameron, Cameron's parents and countless others. Are you and I living with "a peaceful heart?"

"Do our Best! Pray that it is Blessed! And leave the Rest to God!"