

HOMILY for 6th SUNDAY of EASTER – Year C

“Asia was by far my favorite destination,” the woman bragged at the party, though had never been out of the United States. Enigmatic & magical, beautiful beyond belief. And Singapore, of course, is the pearl of the Asian oyster.”

“And what about the pagodas?” a man beside her asked. “Did you see them?”

“Did I see them? My dear, I had dinner with them!”

Anyway, I’m not sure if you’d like to travel or not. But, if you do, you’d need to pack certain belongings for your trips. Some people would like to pack clothes & pillows. Others would bring along food & drink. Some would like to travel light with a small bag while others take a couple of suitcases for a trip. As I reflect on traveling & packing for a trip, I recall the images of little children with backpacks leaving behind their homeland of Ukraine & the horrible war happening there. I don’t know about you, but I often wonder what those poor children put in their backpacks for their long, uncertain journey. Maybe they put in their backpacks stuffed animals, food & drink, games, papers & crayons, or clothes. And what do you think that they should have brought along on their long journey?

The image of the Ukrainian children with their backpacks searching for refuge in another country has brought back my own memory of leaving Viet Nam to avoid the Communist persecution. I was fifteen years old when I had to embark on the same harrowing trip like those Ukrainian children. Like some of them, I was all alone the first time ever in my life. I grew up next door to my grandparents’ home just like the show “Everybody loves Raymond,” & always had some family members & friends around to help me with my daily needs. I remember well that evening of my departure as I had to pack a small bag to bring along without drawing attention from the authority. I thought about packing some food & drink at first; & then switched to some clothes. Next, I changed my mind again & just wanted to take along some medicines & First Aid kit. I went back & forth on what I should pack on this unprecedented & uncertain trip. After much consideration with the help of my family, I decided to go with just Jesus & enough money to pay for my bus fares. I did not know what might be waiting ahead for me or whether I might make it through this uncertain trip. I will not bore you to death with my harrowing trip across the Pacific Ocean. But, I can proudly tell you that I packed it right when I brought Jesus along with me because He was a great source of help & protection for me in time of need & danger. And what do you think that I should have packed for my long, dangerous journey in your opinion?

Jesus knew how important it is for us to pack the right things for our faith journey. That is why Jesus shared with us the following message in this Sunday’s Gospel, “...This much have I told you while I was still with you; the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything & remind you of all that I told you.” He continued, “... ‘Peace’ is my farewell to you, my peace is my gift to you; ...Do not be distressed or fearful... I go away for a while, & I will come back to you.” So evidently Jesus wanted us to pack the Holy Spirit & His peace on our faith journey. But, why did He think that we would need those two things for our spiritual survival? First, Jesus believed that the Holy Spirit would remind us of His messages regularly when He was with us & what He would want us to continue with His legacy. For He knew that we would easily forget His messages over time. He also realized there would be fake prophets & bad leaders who would mislead us & promote their own agendas instead.

That is why Jesus reminded us His disciples this message in last Sunday's Gospel, "...I give you a new Commandment: Love one another... This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another." We all know that many Christians these days do not talk about that important message of Jesus. They would rather talk about political & cultural messages or their own agendas. That is why I called on you last Sunday & this one also to focus on Jesus' message of loving one another if we still claim to be His disciples.

Besides reminding us of Jesus' messages, the Holy Spirit also has the duty of instructing us on what we need to do & showing us on where are supposed to go. Without the Holy Spirit, we would have no clue on what we need to do & where we should go. We would be lost in this world & might head in the wrong direction, away from Heaven. Certainly many bad characters in our world would love to exploit that confusing situation & get us to carry out their own agendas instead of Jesus'. We definitely do not want to be misled or listen to the wrong messages. That is why we need the Holy Spirit to guide us & help us remain true to Jesus' teachings. The Holy Spirit also advises us to make compromises with one another & learn how to live in peace & harmony with our neighbors. That is what the early Christians had to do with the Gentiles & opened up the Church to non-Jewish members. If the early Church did not follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit & do all of that, there would be a civil war in the Church & we who are non-Jewish would not be welcomed into Jesus' family.

Lastly, Jesus wanted us to carry along our faith journey His peace. So, why is Christ's peace so vital to us instead of something else? As you might know, we cannot do anything if we will not have peace in our hearts & souls. We will be restless & make wrong decisions. We will be worried all the time & eventually become hopeless. We will lose our faith in Jesus & abandon Him in tough times. We will follow the wrong way on our faith journey & end up hurting ourselves, even being in the wrong place that will bring our own demise.

My dear brothers & sisters, it is so important for us to pack the right things on our faith journey to Heaven as we've heard in the discussion above. On a TV commercial some time ago, the world tells us to carry along a Visa card & reminds us, "Don't leave home without it!" But, Jesus lets us know in today's Gospel to bring with us the Holy Spirit & His peace at all times. What do you think we should pack for that long journey? More fire power for the political & cultural fights around us? What are you carrying with you now as a Christian? Jesus' message of love & peace, or a fighting & dividing attitude?