

# Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



## Tuesday Eucharistic Celebration

Fr. Larry Snyder, North America

John 14:27-31

The Irish have made countless contributions to Western civilization and culture. If I were to name only two such contributions, I would say: wisdom and humor. Both of these gifts come together in a body of literature called Irish blessings which are very popular especially among those of Irish descent throughout the world. I would like to begin by citing one such blessing which goes like this:

May those who love us, love us.

And those that don't love us, may God turn their hearts.

And if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles

So we'll know them by their limping.

In our Gospel passage today from the Gospel of John, Jesus promises to give us lasting peace. How are we to understand that promise? If we look throughout our history and our world today, there has been constant strife that has taken an enormous toll on the blood and future talent of nations. People of faith have disagreements that are not always resolved in a manner consistent of the charity and respect that are supposed to be the hallmarks of believers. And even in our families there is sometimes discord and a lack of harmony that belies familial ties.

So, can we say that this promise of lasting peace is an empty promise? To even begin to answer that question we must understand the original context in which Jesus uttered these words. As we look at the first disciples, we know that in that first community of believers as they were faced with the prospect of Jesus no longer being physically with them, there was confusion, fear and even chaos. He who had been their anchor as they followed him around the villages of Galilee all the way to the incredible happenings in Jerusalem was soon going to leave them and the question in the front of their minds was this: how would they find their way? Now remember, this was before the transforming experience of Pentecost.

And perhaps it is in understanding the experience of Pentecost that is the key to understanding the promise of peace that Jesus gives. With the descent of the Holy Spirit, the first disciples' minds were opened and they were given an understanding that surpassed mere human reasoning. Their eyes could now see what is possible only with the eyes of faith. The superficial fear and anxiety of simple believers is transformed into the conviction and strength that are truly gifts of the Spirit.

We who are recipients of the Spirit through Baptism and Confirmation benefit from this understanding. There is still strife in the world around us, but if we choose to see with the eyes of faith then we can move beyond what is simply statistical and find fundamental meaning in love and, yes, even in suffering. If we take Jesus at his word, his love can transform our lives from the mundane to the sacred, and his love can consume our hearts with a peace that casts out all fear.

I believe that there is another level of significance for those of us who work in Caritas organizations throughout the world. The people that we serve are frequently confused and afraid; their lives can border

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on the chaotic and they are desperately seeking hope. We all see this especially at times of natural disaster when people's lives are turned upside down by loss and grief. But there are also those who have had a hand in creating the chaos of their lives. We respond with compassion and not judgment.

They are not unlike many of the first disciples in that regard. We are commissioned to help them in their need. But more importantly we are called upon to share with them the message of God's love and to impart a real sense of the peace of Christ. This sets us apart and makes our work holy—for it is God's work.

We choose to love those that society says are unlovable. We choose to serve those that society says are unworthy and undeserving. We do so because we take Jesus at his word that he is with us and his peace will imbue our work. The humor of the Irish blessing that I quoted at the beginning of my remarks actually tells us that God will have no part in our pettiness or narrowness. The love of God cannot be contained by the smallness of human limitations. Every day our work is a testament to that faith.

So let us take Jesus at his word and everyday in our work let us impart a message of peace to those whom God chooses to send to us. It is a message that they are desperate to hear.

May those who love us, love us.

And those that don't love us, may God turn their hearts.

And if He doesn't turn their hearts, may He turn their ankles

So we'll know them by their limping.

In the face of human need and marginalization, may we not be found limping in our love. May we be known for our love for one another and for our service of those in need.