

A rabbi asked his students how they could tell that night was over and a new day had begun. The answers came thick and fast. Some thought that it was when you saw a tree and could recognize that it was a fig tree rather than a lemon tree. Others said it was when you saw an animal in the garden and could see that it was a cat and not a fox. And so it went. “You are all mistaken,” the rabbi said. “You know a new day has begun when you see people in the street and recognize that they are your brothers and sisters. Until then, it will always be night.”

**1. Jesus was good at recognizing people, not just by their appearance but by what was going on inside them**

He could read hearts

People felt comfortable in his presence & not looked down upon or being judged

They felt understood, as if they had something in common with him

When he was with them, they felt as if they were his brothers and sisters

He was like this because there was no pretence in him

He had little time for issues of personal status

He was free to be himself & consequently, he was able to get close to people because his life was not cluttered by things which did not matter

And so when Jesus sent his followers out, he wanted them to be like him

Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals, he said & let your first words be peace to his house

He wanted his disciples to be recognized not by what they were wearing or carrying, but by who they were

Their presence was their message

They were to bring Christ's peace to all they encountered.

Well, we here at St. John the Baptist are today's "72" disciples.

So let's investigate what this peace is that we are called by Jesus to share with our brothers & sisters

2. This week we will celebrate the 240<sup>th</sup> birthday of our nation. **America is viewed by many as especially chosen and blessed by God—a kind of new Jerusalem, showered with material wealth and a long history of relative peace within its borders**

It is true, we are a land of peace and prosperity, but let us not fall into the thinking of some televangelists who claim that following Jesus is tied to earthly rewards

Or fall prey to the thinking that any perceived threat to our national peace and prosperity must be repelled by any means necessary, no matter what the consequences are for the larger world

as Christians, we are constantly called to assess how our life decisions intersect with the kingdom of God

Our faith challenges us to examine our lives and to rid them of things that really do not matter

So what must we do to embrace what matters most?  
Above all else, embrace God's gift of love poured out in Jesus Christ

The cross is and will always be God's expression of love

From that splintered beam of wood, God showed us that love matters most

And love matters most even when anger seethes and disappointment hurts

Love matters most even when frustration drains energy from hope and bitterness squeezes joy out of our dreams

AND SO:

When life beats your hopes into a heap of rubble, we need to ask ourselves: what matters most?

When a diagnosis pillages dreams of the future, we need to ask ourselves: what matters most?

When faith seems to shrivel before the silence of unanswered prayer, we need to ask ourselves: what matters most?

What matters most--the cross of JC conveys the depth of God's love & that matters most

It is a good time to ask whether our understanding of inner peace corresponds to the kind of peace St. Paul says is given to those willing to walk with Jesus

The kind of peace, he says, that is deeply connected to personal sacrifice and to the cross

After all, peace and prosperity have deeper meaning than protected borders, full bank accounts or the freedom to drive large gas-guzzling vehicles

**3. The peace that Jesus was speaking about was a peace that was in conflict with the culture of his day & as Catholic Christians, I believe that we too must be in conflict with all the demands that a materialistic & power hungry world places before us**

Jesus challenged the hypocrisy of those who would stone the adulterous woman, when their own lives were riddled with far greater sins

He spoke out against the strong who imposed heavy burdens upon the weak

And he especially criticized religious leaders who reduced the faith to little practices and neglected the more important aspects of religion, such as compassion and forgiveness  
I fear that we Catholic Christians have assimilated so well into the American mainstream that we have sometimes lost the moral and social imperatives that mark our religion

Let us be peace makers in the mold of Mother Theresa, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, Caesar Chavez and so many others, like Martin Luther King, who fought against the injustices imposed by the prevailing culture

To rebel against a materialistic and often godless culture might mean that we will once again be viewed with suspicion and disdain by America's mainstream population

And so we do need to have the confidence and perseverance to keep stubbornly putting forward what is right and just-- looking for a way to break the mould of discrimination and abuse of power, while not being provoked into imitating the destructive qualities that we are struggling against

**4. Some time ago, I interrupted a conversation among Msgr. Mayo & our two deacons & I asked them a question: When you are in your casket and friends and family are mourning over you, what would you like them to say about you?**

Msgr. Mayo wished that people would think of him as a good organizer , a priest who put the needs of his parishioners first.

Deacon Paul said: I would like them to say that I was a wonderful husband and Father and servant of God who made a difference in the lives of our teens.

And Deacon Dale said: I would like them to say, "Look, he's still moving"

From where I stand, I would have to say that all of us are moving

& in today's gospel, Jesus is telling us, you are the current 72 being sent out, to get moving and to put your faith into action

Well, just as Jesus sent the disciples to announce God's coming kingdom, he sends us today to represent him in all that we do

We are God's hands and God's voice, God's heart and God's love

At the end of the day, what others remember most about us is not our intelligence or our expensive toys, but how we share our love with others?

Certainly, Jesus wants all of us to "get moving" and, each in our own way, each in our own time and place, to proclaim that we walk in the day light when we recognize that all the men and women who walk in the streets here and around the world are all our brothers and sisters...