

Carrying the cross



Jesus walked this earth during the era of the Roman Peace, but he trod soil drenched in the sweat and blood of empirical suppression. The peace of the Roman Empire was not one distinguished by the absence of wars, insurrections, revolts or the usurping of new territories.

It was a peace distinguished by allegiance through force. It sought only to protect the cohesion of the empire, to dominate politics, culture, religion and economy, as well as subjugate resources and people to the cause of its own survival.

Judea was but an unwilling subject of Rome. Discontent bubbled among its people as the occupying authority bought the cooperation of its religious and civic leaders, imposing a peace and stability for the ruling elite, but only poverty and subservience for the people.

It seems an unlikely time for Jesus to tell his disciples, “Peace I leave you; my peace I give you.” It seems especially unlikely, as he knew his words of freedom and a kingdom not of this world were inflammatory. Rome had room for only one kingdom and managed the voices of challenge and dissent in only one way—elimination.

True peace was foreign to the Roman Peace, and a peace not of this world that Jesus spoke of, a peace of harmony of body, soul and mind found in trust in the grace of God, was like a foreign invasion.

Nevertheless, that voice of Jesus continues to speak to this very day. Bishop Ha Chi-shing proclaimed them in Hong Kong on the first day the new National Security Law was in force.

The bishop asked how trust and strength could remain in the hearts of the people after the clashes, suppression, disappointments and broken promises of past years. He asked how the *One Country Two Systems* policy can still be cherished, and how the promise of 50 years of unchanged autonomy could still be believed.

He asked his congregation if they had prayed for those who week to impose these restriction upon them and prayed for them in the suffering they endure, suggesting a peace that can live alongside suffering may be found in that prayer.

He called it a peace that never robs. A peace that never threatens. He described it as the peace that allowed Jesus to say at his arrest, “If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly; why do you strike me?”

“Never lose hope,” he stressed. “Jesus’ cross is a sign of faith. Jesus’ cross is a symbol of suffering, yet also a symbol of joy. It is a symbol of weakness, yet of strength. A symbol of sin, yet of grace; persecution, yet purification; of death, yet resurrection.”

We bow and genuflect before the cross; venerate the cross; but it is in carrying the cross we find the peace of human dignity that no earthly power can touch.

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