

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

In his book, *Go Down to the Potter's House*, Donagh O'Shea has a story about a king who had two artists in his court who were bitter rivals. One day the king said, "I want to decide once and for all which of you is the better artist. You must paint the same theme, so that I can judge between you. And let the theme be peace."

The two artists agreed, and a week later came back with their paintings.

The first presented his painting. It showed a dreamy landscape with rolling hills and a lake with not a ripple on the surface. The whole scene spoke of contentment, peace, stillness. However, as the king looked at the picture, he could barely suppress a yawn. Then turning to the artist he said, "Your picture is pretty, but it puts me to sleep."

Then the second man presented his work. It showed a thundering waterfall. It was so realistic that you could almost hear the roar water as it crashed onto the rocks, many metres below.

"But this is not a scene of peace as I ordered," said the king angrily. The artist made no reply but motioned him to continue looking. Then the king spotted a detail that had hitherto escaped him: among the rocks at the base of the waterfall a small shrub was growing with a bird's nest in its branches. On looking closely at it he noticed there was a bird in the nest: a sparrow sitting on her eggs, her eyes half-closed. She was waiting for her chicks to be born, a perfect picture of peace.

On seeing this, the king was delighted. Turning to the man who had painted it he said, "I like your picture very much. You have conveyed a very important thing about peace, namely, that it is possible to be at peace even in the midst of the hurly-burly of life."

Jesus spoke about peace during the Last Supper. He said to the apostles, "Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give you. A peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. So do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

It was a strange time to talk about peace, because everything was in turmoil around him. So how could he possibly talk about peace just then? Because peace is about being in a right relationship with God. There is nothing that makes our lives "right" or "O.K." more than knowing that we are in a right relationship with God And Jesus simply knew that he

was in a perfect relationship with God. So he was able to talk about peace even as his enemies were closing in on him and death was just around the corner.

Peace is not the same as tranquility. Tranquility is external. Peace is essentially internal. Peace is a state of inner calm, and designates right relations with God and with others. An essential component of peace is righteousness. So there is no peace for the wicked.

Peace results when a person trusts in God, and when the desire to please God is the dominant thing in a person's life. It is something which we can have even in the midst of turmoil, conflict and unresolved problems.

Jesus offers his peace to us: "Peace I leave with you." The peace he offers is not the peace of escape from reality. It is something so deep it is independent of outside circumstances. A peace which passes all understanding, the peace which this world cannot give, a peace no one can take away from us.