Today has been designated 'Peace Sunday' by the Church and is promoted by Pax Christi, the international Catholic organisation that works for peace in the world, based on the gospel and inspired by faith. Peace is not merely an absence of war or conflict – it is not an absence of anything, it is a presence. Just as light is a presence and not simply the absence of darkness. In a well-lit room we don't say: 'Where's the darkness?' but in a dark room we do say: 'Where's the light?'

True peace always begins within, for there is nothing 'out there' in the external world which is not first 'in here', in the internal world of each one of us. Everything in the spiritual life begins within us: what we have within us flows outward toward others, toward the world, toward God. If we have little love for ourselves, we will have little love for others or for God; if our perception of ourselves is distorted and harsh, we will have a distorted and harsh perception of others and of God; if we are persons of fear and anxiety, we will find ourselves living in a fearful and anxious world under a fearsome and menacing God. If, however, we are humble and honest enough to have love for ourselves as we are, with

all our faults and failings and unpleasantnesses – and, more importantly, if are able to *forgive ourselves* for those things – we will have a humble, honest love for others and for God. Whenever we find ourselves unbearable, we find the world unbearable; when we manage to find something loveable in ourselves, we find something loveable in the world too.

This is why the Lord Jesus told us to love our neighbour as ourselves. And he also said: "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20). Whatever I find and know within myself, I find and know in others: the presence of Christ at the centre of me – not just my life but my existence; and the eternal light shining in my heart; and a profound sense of self-acceptance. To encounter these at the centre of myself, opens me to encounter them in others: because it is the same presence, the same light and the same self-acceptance in every being. When I know this – and try to live by it – I am no one's enemy, I am jealous of none, I am not angry with any other person I do not harbour grudges or spread gossip or judge my brothers and sisters; I am in conflict with no one. I am at peace with myself and with those around me.

I say 'acceptance' because it is the womb which gives birth

to peace. To accept oneself – warts and all – enables us to accept others and the world in which we find ourselves. This is the key: *to accept what is, without judgment.* It's a strange and illogical thing that – even though I may not like it – I can accept without judgment that it's raining and I'm wet; or that it's a hot day and I'm sweating; but I cannot seem to accept the way someone else behaves because it annoys me and I want to change it according to my own liking.

What is, in any given moment, simply *is.* Peace comes from accepting things as they are, without judgment. Of course, if it *is* raining, I can open my umbrella; if it *is* hot, I can switch on the fan; if someone *is* annoying me, I can gently remove myself from their company. We can always do what needs to be done. Accepting what *is,* doesn't mean staying wet or sweaty or annoyed – it simply means *not judging* what is, not wanting to change it according to my liking. This means *not getting angry or resentful at what is.* Do something about it if you need to, but don't resent it.

Peace is to be found at the centre of our being. It radiates from there onto others and into the world. We are like monstrances, exposing the peace of Christ on the altar of our

lives. We are servants of that peace. In John 14:27 the Lord Jesus says: "Peace I leave you, my own peace is my gift to you."

For many of us, that gift is still unwrapped, tucked away on a dusty shelf in the library of our heart. If we never open it, we'll never find it anywhere else.