4th Sunday of Easter, B

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Words are somewhat like people, in that they can fall into bad company, run with the wrong crowd, and end up with an unsure reputation. Such luck, it seems, has the word **"salvation."** Because of its associations, one can hardly hear it without thinking of street-corner evangelists, claims of religious magic, and offers of easy, one-way tickets to heaven. And that is most unfortunate because salvation is one of the greatest words of the Bible and one of the deepest needs of the human race.

Who can look at our world today without seeing the pressing urgency of salvation? Our world desperately needs to be saved from that unholy fate; entire nations need to be saved from bitterness and strife. Communities within nations need to be saved from rot and decay. Finally, we can trace the matter all the way back and see that we as individuals need to be saved from the sin and selfishness in which all of our social problems are rooted.

Long ago, in a brief sermon, Simon Peter said, **"This Jesus is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."** He addressed those remarks to the leaders and elders of Israel, the very ones who planned and

arranged the crucifixion. And he was not dealing with religion; he was talking about life, about deliverance from the blindness and hatred in which they were trapped. He was talking to them about rebuilding their lives, rebuilding their nation, and rebuilding the world with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of it all. As an illustration of his message, he pointed to a man by his side and said, **"In his name, this man stands before you healed."** That man had been a crippled beggar at the gate of the temple. Much of our world and many of our lives are crippled today, but they could be made complete by the power of that name.

Salvation in the name of Christ means there is something and someone in this universe that we can trust other than human genius and strength. And don't misunderstand me, I do believe in people. Human nature is not totally corrupt. I know the depths to which it can sink, but I have also seen the heights to which it can rise. My heart is convinced and my mind is made up - I will not allow anyone or anything to rob me of my faith in my fellow man. But if I believed that our salvation was totally dependent on human genius strength and goodness, I would give up in despair.

Jesus also believed in his fellow man. That is one of the most remarkable things about him - his incredible faith in all people. He saw the best that was in them and set himself to bring it out. But he never believed that a person's best was an accident or an unaided

achievement. He believed that human nature at its best was a reflection of the God in whose image that person was made.

Thus, the very Power of the universe is behind the very best in us. We are not assigned the impossible task of saving ourselves and our world in our own strength. That would be a discouraging task indeed. There are forces of salvation at work on whom we can depend and with whom we can align our efforts - saving truths, saving ideas, saving faith, saving hopes. The best in you and me is backed up by all the power of God. We can count on that; we can draw strength from it; and we can go out to face our task supported by it. That is one thing that salvation in the name of Christ means.

It also means that the power of persuasion is greater than the power of brute force and that the power of love is greater than the power of hate.

The audience to whom Peter spoke had tried brute force. Calvary was the ultimate power play. They would be rid of this bothersome Christ and his message of love by nailing them both to a cross. Now, here was one of his followers back before them, offering salvation in the name of him they had crucified. Their use of force had utterly failed and the persuasive power of love was still reaching out.

This message of salvation of Christ is right at home in a cruel and chaotic world. That is where it got started. They killed the

Prince of Glory, but neither he nor his message could be so easily destroyed. He came back from the grave, and his message of love was back on the street. It is not easy on days like these to believe in the power of persuasive love. Of course, it is not easy; it never has been. Salvation in the name of Christ has never been a bed of roses. It started with sacrificial love face to face with cruel violence, and where it started it still stands. There is no other way. Peter said**, "Nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."** It is a desperately difficult remedy for a world that is desperately sick.

Finally, salvation in Christ saves us from ourselves. Peter could preach with confidence; it saved him from himself, from his arrogance, and his fear.

We need that same kind of personal salvation - to be saved from our self - self-gratification by a disturbing vision of what we ought to be, to be saved from our fears by faith, to be saved from senselessness by a sense of high purpose, to be saved from weakness by inner reserves of spiritual strength, to be saved from sin by the constant companionship of Christ in whose presence we want to be our best.

We can never understand or experience salvation in Christ until we approach it with a sense of need like that we have just

described. We are not speaking now of religious magic or an easy one-way ticket to heaven.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are talking about the salvation that we need here and now. Our world needs it, and you and I need it every day that we live. It can be ours when and if we make Christ and his truth the cornerstone of our lives. **Amen.**