

HOM 20th Sunday 2022 C August 14

There is a certain dissonance to Jesus' words in today's Gospel reading. When He says that He has come to establish not peace but division, it strikes us as being inconsistent with what He has repeatedly said elsewhere. In the upper room, he twice greets the apostles with PEACE BE WITH YOU (John 27: 21). On another occasion He says to them: "*Peace I leave with you.*" "*My peace I give you.*" (John 14:27) Greetings of peace are found more than a dozen other times in the New Testament.

Also, in John's Gospel account (12: 32), we hear Him say that "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself*", and in his Letter to the Ephesians (1: 9-10), St. Paul teaches that God's plan of salvation is to make all things ONE in Jesus.

So, in today's Gospel reading, the division Jesus came to establish cannot contradict the peace and oneness He offers us. Rather, it must mean separating people from the Evil One who in his rebellion against God at the beginning of creation, led not only other angels away from Him, but Man as well. Satan's separation from God is instantaneous and eternal. The Devil's opposition to the Creator – his work of turning Man against God through sinful disobedience in order to ruin Man -- continues. But although Adam and Eve fell for the Serpent's lies, disobeyed God, and lost the grace of the Holy Spirit and so separated not only themselves but all of their descendants from God, Humanity was not eternally separated from God.

Rather, in God's mysterious, merciful plan of Salvation, the Son of God became also the Son of Man Who was obedient to the Father's will unto the Cross and Resurrection. By this Jesus restored to Man through Baptism and the other sacraments, the grace of the Holy Spirit, enabling men and women to know and live the Truth – to know and do God's will – to have consummate oneness with God and one another in Holy Communion with Jesus, and so attain eternal life and blessedness.

In today's Gospel reading, however, by saying that He came to establish division, Jesus prophesied that not all men and women, in the end, would necessarily accept His offer of oneness with Himself in doing the Father's will unto the Cross and Resurrection. He said that there would be division over this even in families and among friends we may suppose – that some would side with the Devil and some would side with Him.

Today, there is division all around. There is division about abortion, about contraception, about so-called same-sex marriage, about transgenderism, and many more issues such as immigration, racism, gun control, climate change, socialism, and religion. Not all of this division has to do with a rejection of God, His will, and the fullness of Truth revealed in Jesus Who also sent the Holy Spirit to guide His Church into all truth. We may suppose that there are people on both sides of certain issues who love God and seek to do His will in oneness with Jesus, or even otherwise if they are not Christians.

With regard to immigration, for example, people on both sides would probably agree that immigration is good but disagree on HOW and IF it is to be controlled. The same could be said about Second Amendment rights i.e., gun control. The disagreement may not be over the right to keep and to bear arms in self-defense or hunting game, but over how to prevent mass shootings for example. Likewise, while it is universally accepted that racism is very wrong, many would certainly not agree that all people of one race are oppressors and all other people are victims of oppression. Similarly, most people seem to think that climate change is a reality, but there is disagreement about its cause and the extent to which it CAN or SHOULD be controlled. And while both sides want the betterment of humanity, there is long-standing division about how much government and how much individual responsibility is needed to attain this.

When it comes to issues where God's will and some measure of Truth is to be found on both sides, prudential judgment based on unchanging principles is to be applied to arrive at an acceptable course of

action that is not in violation of God's will or the natural law of right reason. Conservative and liberal approaches to things are at times like the complementary differences between male and female – husband and wife -- that must both be respected to arrive at what is truly good. Yet, even in marriage there is a primacy of judgment that must be maintained to have order instead of disorder, discord, division, and chaos. Biblically, that primacy of judgment belongs to the husband, but it is understood that if the husband is incapable of right judgement, that primacy falls to the wife or even children.

Even with all this in mind, however, it must be said that there is division around us that clearly has a demonic side or dimension. This is in regard to issues involving certain actions which, based on the Word of God and the natural law of right reason, the Church has consistently taught are intrinsically evil. Abortion is one of these. The life of both the unborn child and its mother must be protected. It is never morally OK i.e., God's will, that an unborn child be directly and deliberately killed. To do so is intrinsically evil, and an intrinsically evil act freely committed, or the support or promotion of it, separates the perpetrator from God's grace and therefore from God Himself. It separates the person from Jesus who is the only way to the Father's House.

Essentially, the same can be said about contraception, which is intrinsically evil, and about same sex marriage and transgenderism.

To say this today, however, is to put oneself at risk, like the prophet Jeremiah in our first reading, who was lowered into mud at the bottom of an empty cistern and left to die for speaking the word of God to his country's leaders. The King had him pulled out, however, only to have his countrymen kill him later (most scholars believe). Jesus Himself was crucified for speaking the Truth. He endured the opposition of sinners as we heard in our second reading and resisted sin i.e., disobedience to his Father's will, to the point of shedding His Blood unto the Cross. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews also points out that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses – prophets, martyrs, and other saints -- who also resisted sin, spoke the truth with love and courage and, as a result, suffered and died in spiritual oneness with Jesus.

With all this in mind, remember, that Jesus came to draw all to Himself – all the willing. He said He came to set the earth on fire in order to make this happen, and that His anguish in working to bring this about would be great until the earth was ablaze. He was referring here to His Oblation—His Self-Offering -- unto the Cross and Resurrection by which the fire of Holy Spirit would be poured out to the Church, especially through the sacraments so that His disciples – you and I – would be able to live and speak the Truth with love and courage and offer ourselves with Him in Holy Communion unto the Cross and Resurrection for the life of the world.

This is how, the fire Jesus set grows into a blaze that encompasses the world and unites all the willing to Him in doing the Father's will. Listen to how Pope Benedict XVI put this in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacrament of Charity*:

The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' self-oblation. More than just statically receiving this incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. Jesus draws us into himself. The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces into creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of 'nuclear fission', to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all. (1 Cor 15:28)

What Benedict seems to propose here is that just as a critical mass of nuclear material brought together can set off an explosive chain reaction that releases a tremendous amount of energy, so, a sufficient level

of self-offering by the faithful i.e., “*a critical mass*,” can set off a chain reaction of self-offering among the willing that communicates tremendously the power of the Holy Spirit to all people, quickly encompassing the whole world with divine love and transfiguring it. This process, he says, can reach the point whereby God is all in all (1 Cor. 15: 28), and this, of course, corresponds to the realization of the “*new heaven and the new earth*” (Rev. 21: 1) at the end of time with Christ’s return in glory.

Brothers and sisters, I invite you to be a part of this by joining in Jesus’ saving oblation with me. Just pray these words silently and sincerely at every Holy Communion and strive to live them out in-between: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.