

20th Ordinary Sunday

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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When we read today's Gospel passage, questions and doubts may arise in our minds. Why did Jesus speak about divisions? What did he mean? Was he not interested in peace? "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" By saying this, did Jesus put his followers in danger, shock, and terror? I remember as a child, reading this passage after the family prayer in the evening, as kids we would look at each other and say in our minds: "You fellow, would you betray me?"

What did Jesus intend by saying he brings division? What kind of division does he mean?

Jesus is the Son of God who brings peace to the world. In the Infancy Narrative, St. Luke states that Jesus brings peace for those who accept him. The beautiful praise from the heavenly hosts at his birth was: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" During the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, when taking the one who brings peace to the earth, Jesus, in his arms, Simeon proclaimed: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed." Jesus is simultaneously presented as a sign of peace and dissension.

Pope Francis explained this Gospel passage in one of his homilies, regarding Jesus bringing division: "It means that faith is not a decorative or ornamental element; living faith does not mean decorating life with a little religion, as if it were a cake and we were decorating it with cream. No, this is not faith. Faith means choosing God as the criterion and basis of life..." (At Angelus, Saint Peter's Square, on Sunday, 18 August 2013) Thus, in his teachings, Jesus was clearly telling his disciples about the cost of discipleship when making radical choices.

I remember an incident that occurred during a Popular Mission Retreat. This is a form of parish mission or retreat that was started by St. Vincent De Paul. During the Mission, the preachers visit the houses of parishioners. Each priest is assigned some houses to visit



and to pray at. As part of the house visit, I entered a house and met the family members. I learned that the husband of that household has never gone to church nor participates in family prayer. He does not even allow his wife and children to pray or go to church. Whenever they started to pray, he would yell using abusive language. When I asked him for his name, he replied: “Why should I say my name to you?” He was not at all interested in speaking to me. After a while, I said: “Okay no worries, this is a house-visit that is part of the mission in the parish. We shall have a small prayer.” I invited everyone to join in the prayer. As soon as I started the prayer, the husband started to yell his special offensive language, some of which I had never even heard in my life. Somehow I managed to finish the prayer. After the prayer, I told him: “Hi brother, Jesus loves you!” He stared at me and said: “Get lost, you...” I remember the wife, in tears, said: “Father, I pray every day to Jesus to touch his stubborn heart.” In my understanding, this is what Jesus referred to when he said there will be division in the family because of him.

Even during the time of Jesus, Jesus' mission even caused division among his family members. Not everyone agrees with his message and that is why even the members of the same family will be divided against each other. This does not refer to the breakup of relationships, rather, taken in the proper context, the words of Jesus refer to the division that results from following Him: which would divide good from evil, and believers from non-believers. What Christ meant is that when we follow the teachings of Christ, we certainly will end up being different from those who don't follow His teachings; hence resulting in division.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew (10:22), Jesus warns that “... you will be hated by all because of my name.” This is the only reason why the Christians are being targeted, attacked, and killed in many parts of the world. Pope Francis said: “Following Jesus entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests. And this indeed divides; as we know, it even cuts the closest ties. However, be careful: it is not Jesus who creates division! He establishes the criterion: whether to live for ourselves or to live for

God and for others; to be served or to serve; to obey one's own ego or to obey God.” (Ibid) Jesus invites all of his followers to be a part of his family. The family of Jesus consists of people who hear his word and put it into practice. In Luke (12:50), Jesus assures us: “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

How to face the dissent in our faith Journey:

Believing and Trusting in Jesus who never abandons us.

Being Meek and Humble in our lives.

Loving others and not hating them.

Being nonchalant.

Not interfering in the arguments.

Praying for the dissenters.