

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 18, 2019
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Homily

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" Even an atheist would agree that he has succeeded. We're familiar with schism as Christians reject the governance of the pope and bishops. The Church faces heresy as the baptized persistently deny her teachings on faith and morals. Some even commit apostasy, rejecting faith itself. East and west, north and south, liberal and conservative, high and low: groups are divided from each other. Individuals face division within themselves as well. Faith struggles with doubt and difficulty; indifference undermines fervour; passion rails against truth; yet grace allows repentance to master sin.

Why would Jesus want to bring division? We need to remember that what unites us is greater than what divides us. Jesus prayed for our unity at the Last Supper, and his prayer is effective. We are tied together in a hidden bond of faith. We can easily perceive the divisions, but need faith to apprehend our unity: as followers of Christ. This faith is tried and tested and purified by its encounter with division. It grows greater and grows better when we open ourselves to God and choose to accept his gifts of grace. Becoming one with Christ, loving him, serving him: this brings us closer to our neighbour, overcoming what sets us apart.

Jer 38:4-6, 8-10
Ps 40
Heb 12:1-4
Lk 12:49-53

Receiving his love and mercy makes us instruments of his love and mercy. Our acts of mercy conform us to the likeness of God. Mercy flows through us, it sticks to us, it transforms us.

We see this in our first reading. Babylon was set to overcome Jerusalem, and loyal soldiers wanted to resist. God told Jeremiah that the people should submit. Then "the officials said to the king, 'This man ought to be put to death, because he is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such words to them.'" So they threw him in a well. Jeremiah sank in the mud. Perhaps he turned to God: "I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined and heard my cry." But the king responded with mercy: "pull the prophet Jeremiah up from the cistern before he dies." Like Lazarus from the cave, like Jesus from the tomb, "He brought me up out of the pit; Out of the miry clay; He set my feet upon a rock; And made my footsteps firm." Even this wicked king, who did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 24:19), even he participated in the mercy of God.

And how much more can we do? We receive so many graces from the sacraments. They "let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." We're not alone in this race, but raised up by the intercession of the saints. They're like cheering fans on the sidelines speeding us to the finish line.

Jesus speaks of mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. Mary is our mother in faith. The catechism says, "by her manifold intercession (she) continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation." She prays for us, and against the sin within us; countering the impulses that try to divide us from her loving gaze and gentle touch. In her canticle, she said that God "has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy."

For this Eucharist, let us entrust ourselves to Mary, that she might send us the grace of mercy against the division that confronts us.