



In this Year of Faith the Gospel calls us to face the painful reality of division within the Household of Faith, the Church.

“Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?” Jesus asked in the Sunday Gospel of August 18th. His answer is startling: “No, I tell you, [I have come for] division.” Division?

It is true. Christ the Divider strikes at the root of our relationships. “From now on a household . . . will be divided” in deep and two-sided fashion: father against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother.

Jesus speaks from experience: he brought division to his own household. “Son, why have you treated us so?” his Mother said to him when she and Joseph found him in the Temple. “Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously” (Luke 2:48). Later on, this division extended to Jesus’ wider family: “When his relatives heard [that he was home], they set out to seize him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21). Furious over his words in the synagogue, his neighbors in Nazareth “drove him out of the town . . . to the brow of the hill . . . to hurl him down headlong” (Luke 4:29). Jesus’ own life shows it clearly: he who “is our peace” has come for division (Ephesians 2:14).

From this painful reality Jesus does not shield his disciples. To share

his friendship is to enter his life and let him enter ours. He opens his whole life up to our entry, and he comes into ours with all the fullness of his divinity and humanity, bringing with him all the division he experienced on earth as man.

Therefore, in the Year of Faith the Gospel calls us to face the painful reality of division within the Household of Faith, the Church. As the media disseminates the aggressively anti-Christian mind set of the courts, the workplace, and the college campus, friendships and families fall under its widening shadow as well. Belief weakens; prayer wanes; worship ceases. Division comes home to the household of faith. Which Catholic family does not experience it? We should not be surprised if ours does. In the Christian life, Jesus promises, household division goes with the territory.

The fault line runs along different ways of looking at our past. From the suffering of innocent Job in the Old Testament to the Passion of innocent Jesus in the New, the God of the Bible doesn’t measure up to the standards we poor humans set for Him. When our faith falters or fails, He seems impossibly inconsistent, even two-sided. The God of the Promise commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, and then relents when Abraham lifts his knife in obedience. The God of Redemption sends his Son to bring both peace and division. The All Holy God founds a Church that often seems more scandalous than saintly. Between this God and those who cannot put their faith in Him a “dividing wall of hostility” builds up (Ephesians 2:14) as time and again He fails the test of

our expectations. He refuses to be the God we insist that He be.

At a key moment of division in his own life Jesus gave us just the question we need to raise in the face of this hostility within the household of faith. Upon hearing him speak of his flesh as food and his blood as drink, many disciples “drew back and no longer walked with him.” So he looked at his Apostles and asked, “Will you also go away?” (John 6:66-67).

“Lord, to whom shall we go?” Peter answered for the Church then and now (John 6:68). Notice that he said “we,” not “I.” The plural is significant: we are not alone in raising objections against God; nor are we the first to be tempted to “go away.” The soul-stretching struggle to believe in Jesus Christ has persisted through 2,000 years of seeking and finding, of knocking and opening, of asking and receiving. A “great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us (Hebrews 12:1); they all testify to the truth of Peter’s confession: “Lord, you have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

The Samaritan woman is among them (John 4:7-42). Suspicious and defensive, she was not slow to raise objections when she met Jesus at the well. But his gentle patience in responding led her to realize that the “dividing wall of hostility” was not so much between them as within herself. Jesus broke it down with his mercy. Pardon and peace put an end to division. Then and there the woman ceased putting God to the test and let Him put her to the test. She left her water jar behind, empty now of her insistence that God meet her expectations of Him, and went back to the village determined to

meet His expectations of her. And there was no mistaking the joy of her return.

Jesus came for the division that makes us whole: he came for the Breaking of the Bread. He came to hand himself over to sinners in the life-giving division of his Body and Blood. He came to be divided unto death in order to be distributed unto life. And he says to us at every Mass, “Do this in memory of me.”