

Homily for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This past week I was away on our family vacation down in Bethany Beach. There were about 25 of us in the same house, and we had a great time. Yes, we like being with one another, even for a whole week! Well, with that much time together, you can imagine there was ample opportunity for lots of topics of conversation to come up, one of which was politics. And you still had a good time, Father? Well, yes.

Now, don't get me wrong, the next leader of the United States and the future of our great nation are very important topics. And as Catholics, the Church teaches that we have a moral obligation to take our participation in civic life seriously. However, I am so tired of the bitter, rancorous, vitriolic, divisiveness – I tried to come up with really colorful words – that exists right now between the two so-called “mature adults” who are running for president and their followers.

And today on Facebook I saw a picture of a church sign that expresses how I really feel about this sad state of affairs: “Have the donkey and the elephant let you down? Turn to the Lamb.” Yes, turn to the Lamb. If we think that the Republicans or the Democrats are going to save our country or save our world, then we have another thing coming – many times we can't even keep our own domestic house in order! But Jesus – He's the way, the truth, and the life!

The thing is, in our Gospel today Jesus taught His followers, “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three, etc., etc.” But, wait a minute, I thought Jesus was the Prince of Peace? He is. But I thought He was the alternative candidate – why did He say He would bring division? Because he knew that not everyone would accept the true peace that He would offer.

Now, unlike politics where compromise is the key to progress, when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, there can be no compromise – we are either for Him or against Him. We are told by St. Paul in the second reading today to keep our eyes “fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.” So, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is a deep, abiding relationship with Jesus, and 1 is no relationship with Him whatsoever, where would you say you fall? This question isn’t meant to judge or to criticize; it’s just meant to help us assess where we are in our spiritual lives so that we can grow more in our faith.

The thing is, once that cat's out of the bag that you're taking your faith in Jesus seriously, other people, including some family members, might give you a hard time. And certainly, the evil one won't take kindly to you being closer to God. And I think we instinctively know this. And so the temptation is to treat our faith like a political contest, where compromise leads to progress. But, if we compromise on our faith, then we're really not keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. We have our eyes fixed on others, and what they might say. We have our eyes fixed on ourselves and our self-image. And we have our eyes fixed on the world and the standards it accepts.

My friends, let us truly pray for our nation and for the upcoming elections on all levels of government. These are very difficult times. But we are promised by Scripture that the truth will set us free. Jesus is that truth. And if we keep our eyes fixed on Him, as individuals and as a nation, we will find the peace we are looking for. But, in the meantime, realize that being a committed follower of Jesus means a ballot-box full of division. God bless you.