

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 22nd 2015

So the Prince of Peace has apparently changed His script and speaks in today's Gospel of fire, and division. Jesus states quite definitely that He knows what He is about. what He must accomplish is clear to Him. His baptism in the Jordan has oriented Him to baptize or purify or bless this world with the saving waters and blood flowing from His Body on the cross. The fire is His spirit and the baptism, for which He longs to experience, is his bodily mission.

Jesus is the Divine Inviter and presents to His hearers and watchers, the opportunity for each to accept or reject. It is interesting to note that Jesus does not talk about friends, neighbors, business partners being separated from one another. Rather, in the times of Jesus, family unity was so sacred and identifying. It was the basis of stability in the Jewish culture according to the law of Moses. This is exactly how dramatic the response of each person has to be. The father or mother will not be the deciding person in the relationship to which Jesus is inviting. The response will be personal, intimate and interior.

Mary of Nazareth would be the first to feel this division, this upbreking of the unity of the family founded within the ancient Jewish tradition, as she found Jesus in the temple. He was about fulfilling the Old Law by being obedient and the new law by His beginning to amaze and confound the Doctors of that Law. The early disciples were equally challenge as they bought into their leaving the old for the baptizing life of Jesus. The Gospels relate many stories of those who accepted and those who denied the inviting gestures of Jesus.

All relationships provoke tensions, because while something is being offered so as to be received, something is being ask-for, let-go-of, surrendered. Jesus knew that He had received Himself both as a Gift of the Father to this human existence and that His own baptism was going to be the result of His letting go, His offering-back of His Life. His mother was standing at the foot of His baptismal font and feeling the divisive call to exchange the comfort of certainty for the un-peace of confusion. Her family was falling apart every time she heard her Son's violating the Law, yet she kept pondering and wondering and allowing the invitations to keep coming.

By nature, invitations are offered and received with freedom on both sides. Neither can be forced. The first time I phoned a young female for a date she declined! Imagine that! I wanted to convince her that she was making a terrible mistake which would haunt her rest of her life. We both survived and I doubt she remembers the event as I do as I write this with clenched teeth. Force does not produce the response of faith, but the reaction of resentment. Jesus came and still comes offering gestures and words, not to convince or convict, but, what? He asks for the beginning of our accepting our being loved, healed and freed to be His sisters and brothers. Jesus is explicitly stating that He has come not to offer a false peace which comes from not caring, but a personal response which flows from a decision to be cared for by the creating God even if this decision were to violate the most normal and familial relationships. The peace Jesus offers is the fruit of His being baptized on the cross, and we are invited to receive the peace He offers to those united by Him.