

PERSEVERE IN RUNNING THE RACE, KEEPING OUR EYES FIXED ON JESUS.

Someone who works as a consultant, helping companies that are going through major changes, such as mergers or re-organizations said that employees in these companies are usually comfortable with the way things are, and experience high levels of stress and anxiety when there is a change. That consultant explains this reaction in terms of predictability: We are comfortable when our lives have basic patterns that help us predict what will happen to us.

This is true in relationships as well. We get to know a spouse or friend so well that we can predict how that person will behave, or what he or she will say. When they act “out of character,” we find it uncomfortable because it calls into question our expectations of who this person is. Do we really know them as well as we thought?

The words of Jesus in today’s Gospel may make us uncomfortable for the same reason. They don’t seem to fit with our expectations of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, the teacher who said *blessed are the peacemakers* (Mt.5:9) – the gentle and kind Jesus who healed the sick and gathered the little children to him.

But perhaps it is healthy to have our expectations of Jesus challenged. We can become too comfortable in thinking that we know all there is to know about him, and so we put Jesus into a well-defined box as if our human minds could fully understand God.

So what is Jesus telling us today? His words are meant to shake us up, to challenge any notion we might have that following him is comfortable and predictable. Instead, we may find ourselves at odds with those who are closest to us. The life Jesus calls us to live – to believe in him and to love one another – leads us along a narrow path.

So when Jesus is speaking of division, he is speaking of the ongoing battle between good and evil, between who believe and follow him and those who reject him. It is Jesus’ intention to offer God’s forgiveness and love to all who would accept it. Division results from the fact that there will always be those who resist Jesus’ offer.

This battle can go on even within our own selves – with part of us wanting to love and follow his way and part of us wanting to go in the opposite direction.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that Christ himself had to suffer, enduring even the shame of the cross. We are urged to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus as we run our own race, and to let go of sin that weighs us down. Jesus endured opposition from those who did not believe in him. We can expect the same. When that happens, we can look to the example of Jesus and the great “cloud of witnesses” to whom the Letter to the Hebrews refers, knowing that peace and reconciliation await us at the finish line.

This past Tuesday, we had our first meeting with the Unification committee, the liturgical, naming and communication teams. More information will follow. Stay tuned.

Fr. Edmond