

## Homily Sunday 20C: 18 Aug 2013: HT-W/XII-PC

The past year I've had a few encounters w/ my extended family: a couple funerals and a visit to relatives while on vacation. Like many families, our attitudes towards the Catholic faith vary. Some are very engaged w/ the Church--go to Mass regularly, enroll the kids in Catholic school, volunteer at the parish, and so on. Others are less devout. Others have abandoned religious practice altogether. So gatherings get a tad stressful when the topic of religion surfaces. And I know this problem is common to many families.

The Lord Jesus talks about this matter; in fact, he predicts it. He speaks of how he has come to bring division, to set fathers against sons and mothers against daughters. The fiery temper of his speech indicates its arduous character: he speaks of blazing fire and personal anguish; talk of baptism suggests an intense process that separates and purifies. Even in Jesus' day people were bitterly divided about him. Some of his own family rejected him. The church he established came to be seen as a heresy within Judaism: Jewish followers of the Jesus the Jew came to be expelled from their own synagogues. This religious drama where loyalty to Jesus severs family ties has continued through the 2 millennia of Church history.

For those of us in divided households, this timely selection raises the question of what to do. I offer a few suggestions. First, we must remain faithful to Jesus and bear witness to his gospel. This means staying true to our Catholic identity and our Savior's teachings even when this offends our family. As the Lord affirmed, anyone who loves father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter more than him, is not worthy of him. We must love our unbelieving relatives, yes, but we must love Jesus more. Second, we should pray for erring family members. Indeed, if we truly love them, we must pray for them. If we love them, we want what is best for them, and there is no greater blessing than believing in God's love for the world, a love which is manifested in Jesus his only Son and which is fully shared in his Church. Third, we must suffer as Catholics for our relatives. Their unbelief is a source of sorrow for us, a sorrow that intensifies in proportion to our love for them. One thinks of Jesus weeping over his beloved Jerusalem, doomed for its lack of faith. One thinks of St. Paul's anguish over the unbelief of his fellow Israelites. But we should also remember the hopeful example of St. Monica, the mother of the great St. Augustine. Her dear son wandered far from the Catholic fold. He explored many other philosophies and religions. He was a bit too smart for his own good. But thru Monica's unceasing prayers and frequent tears, this errant sinner was draw back to the Church. And the former apostate became one of the greatest teachers of the Catholic religion. So too we can hope that the faithless members of our families may be converted thru our witness, prayers, & passion. May the Good Shepherd who gathers back the lost sheep assist us in bringing back our beloved lost ones to the family of faith.