

Trinity 12

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." To many, these words of Jesus do not seem to fit his character. Given what we know of Jesus, this saying may appear contradictory, almost out of character. We associate Jesus with peace. On the night that Jesus was born, the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." Jesus clearly taught non-violence and non-retaliation. He declared that peacemakers were blessed. He taught his followers to turn the other cheek when slapped on one cheek. And he wept over Jerusalem because it rejected the things that make for peace. Jesus' followers proclaimed the gospel of peace and Paul saw himself as an ambassador of reconciliation. Jesus was surely no promoter of division but the Prince of Peace.

However, we cannot dodge the challenging words of today's gospel reading. They address an all too common reality. To follow Jesus is to attract detractors, persecutors and opposition, sadly, often from within one's own family. Jesus was no stranger to family division. It seems likely that members of his own family were not sympathetic to his ministry and John informs us that members of his extended family refused to believe in him.

The purpose of Jesus' mission was peace but his presence would inevitably divide. His words are true even today. To follow Jesus wholeheartedly and uncompromisingly incurs hostility. We soon discover who our true friends are if we take a stand for Christ. To follow Jesus is a radical call. Sometimes to embrace the gospel is to lose the affection of the world.

Jesus knew that to follow him would mean opposition and suffering for his disciples. He warned them of it on many occasions. However, it was not until they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit that they were willing to accept and face it for themselves. But Jesus did not ask anything of his followers, which he was not willing to face himself. At this point in the gospel, he was on his way to Jerusalem. He knew that there he would face suffering and death. Yet nothing would prevent him from fulfilling what he knew to be the Father's will. In fact, he longed for this hour to come. Jesus calls us not to be afraid to face

opposition, not to turn away from suffering. He has gone before us on the road, and he is with us now.

Ask Jesus today to help you to be his faithful disciple and never be afraid to walk where he has led.

That is what we will see happen at Baptism. The promises are demanding and the responses uncompromising.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has
told us

that to enter the kingdom of heaven

we must be born again of water and the Spirit,

and has given us baptism as the sign and seal of this
new birth.

Here we are washed by the Holy Spirit and made
clean.

Here we are clothed with Christ,

dying to sin that we may live his risen life.

As children of God, we have a new dignity

and God calls us to fullness of life.

In baptism, God calls us out of
darkness into his marvellous light.

To follow Christ means dying to sin and
rising to new life with him.

Therefore I ask:

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

I come to Christ.

Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem for the final time. He was going there to make the great sacrifice that would give us, humanity new life, And so we welcome Henry as the newest follower of the faith that Jesus has handed down to us through the teachings of the church, which is One, Catholic and Apostolic.