**20th Sunday: C**

**Does Christ divide our families?**

*(A reflection of Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli)*

After the Baptism of his baby brother in the church, little Johnny sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, “That priest said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I want to stay with you guys!”

A Christian home is where there is the presence of Christ. The family members live the Gospel ideals in daily lives. The Word of God is translated into action. There is unity, love and respect for one another. Absolutely there is no place for division in our families. Jesus does not come to divide our families.

In today’s gospel we hear Jesus talking about division in the family. A divided family can’t stand strong. Jesus said in Luke 11/17 "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.” Why did Jesus say that he did not come to establish peace but division? Why did Jesus say, “From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law?"

When Jesus said, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will not have life,” many left him saying, “This is a difficult teaching!” But I think this teaching about division in the family is more difficult to understand and accept. Does Christ divide our families? How do we understand this teaching?

When Jesus spoke these words he was on his way to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. So he taught his disciples upon the mystery of suffering. This gospel is more focused on the mystery of suffering. Following Christ may cause suffering and divisions in the family because each one has the free will to believe in Christ or not. Christian history tells us that saints like Francis of Assisi, disregarded their families to follow Jesus. Others gave up their lives and became martyrs.

St. Perpetua was a young, well-educated, noblewoman and mother living in the city of Carthage in North Africa. Her mother was a Christian and her father was a pagan. In terms of her faith, Perpetua followed the example of her mother. Despite the pleas of her father to deny her faith, Perpetua did the very opposite, and fearlessly proclaimed it. At the age of 22, she was imprisoned for her faith. While in prison she continued to care for her infant child and put up with the tortures designed to make her renounce her faith. Perpetua remained steadfast until the end. St. Perpetua was sacrificed at the games as a public spectacle for not renouncing her faith.

Jesus described suffering in three ways: Fire, Baptism, and Division. All these have the same connotation. They all mean suffering and death for Christ. We receive this **Fire** through Baptism and Confirmation. This fire burns us up and we become naught to ourselves but a pure disciple for Christ. Like Paul said, “It is not I who live, but it is Christ in me.” **Baptism** is suffering and death. When we received Baptism we commit to Jesus and promise to suffer with him and die if needed for his sake. **Division** is the result of resisting the call of Jesus. Jesus chose this word to illustrate that his discipleship is even more important than family ties.

Didn’t Jesus come to bring peace? Certainly! His entire mission consisted in bringing peace to the world shattered by sin. So when Jesus speaks of division, he is speaking of the ongoing battle between good and evil; between those who believe and follow him and those who reject him. Jesus offers forgiveness and love to all who would accept it.

Division results from the fact that there will always be those who resist Jesus’ offer!