

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

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By Archbishop William E. Lori

Today's Gospel offers both comfort and challenge. The comfort it offers, however, is at best "cold" comfort - it comforts the way gallows humor amuses - but here it is - This Gospel reminds us that the roots of current deep divisions in society and even in the Church are nothing new but are rather a constant part of life because they are deeply rooted in the human heart. I can see you're feeling better already!

As we listened to the Gospel, we did indeed meet a people deeply divided. A fierce debate was raging about just who this Jesus was - about his background and about his mission. Some thought he should be thrown into jail; others, including security guards, were attracted by his words: "Never before has anyone spoken like this one!" they said. Those in charge dismissed as ignorant the people who were attracted to Jesus and when the ever-diplomatic Nicodemus tried to moderate the debate, he too was shouted down in an early display of identity politics.

Yes, it all has a vaguely familiar ring, doesn't it? Divided societies are nothing new - but dividedly we surely are! We blame this on the news media, on political parties, instantaneous communications, on higher education, and much more. But this one intractable fact remains: the ultimate source of these divisions - in Jesus' day and ours - is found in the deep divisions in the human heart.

To illustrate: many years ago, I experienced chest pains and wound up in a hospital. As I awaited diagnosis, a friend brought me a copy of L'Osservatore Romano. On the front page was a bold headline from John Paul II's Wednesday catechesis: "The human heart is divided between love and lust." When the doctor came to tell me my test results, I held the paper up and said, "Doc, this is what's wrong with my heart - it's divided!" Being a good Catholic, the doctor didn't refer me for a psychological evaluation! Yes, John St. Paul II nailed it: the human heart is divided between love and lust - between the unity and peace that comes from loving God and neighbor, on one hand and the discord and conflict that results from that lust which is idolatry, on the other... that self-centered grasping for money, pleasure, and power that spells enmity with God and neighbor.

Embedded in divisions both ancient and new is a challenge and it's this: no one can be neutral about Jesus. There is no middle position - either one is for or against. The

Lord's own words come to mind: "Do not think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace, but the sword!" (Mt. 10:34). Elsewhere he says, "He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters" (John 11:23). Jesus, it seems, is the great disrupter of human history!

In his October 1962 address opening the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. John XXIII addressed the challenge that is Jesus: "The great problem confronting the world after almost two-thousand years remains unchanged. Christ is ever resplendent as the center of history and of life. Men are either with him and his Church, and then they enjoy light, goodness, order, and peace. Or else they are without him, or against him, and deliberately opposed to his Church - and then they give rise to confusion, to bitterness in human relations, and to the constant danger of fratricidal wars."

And while Pope St. John XXIII spoke in sweeping historical terms, we also know that the our decision for or against Jesus is intensely personal - indeed it penetrates to the core of who are and who were called to become.

How, then, do we respond to the challenge Jesus lays before us? And how might our response to this challenge affect the divisions all around us? We respond, I assure you, not solely by our own resources and efforts. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say: "Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him. Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind, and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth" (CCC no. 153). But that's not the whole story. It goes on say, "Believing is possible only by the grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act" - an act that is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason, nor still less to human dignity (cf. no. 154).

This Lenten season of prayer and repentance is a graced time for you and me to discern what part of the challenge that is Jesus we have not yet met. What areas of our lives attempt to straddle the fence between belief and unbelief? What part of us is in the embrace of love and what part in the thrall of lust? What compromises, accommodations, do we make with sin and evil? As we undergo a discerning examination of conscience, let us be clear that the fault does not lie with the gift of faith we've been given but rather our lack of receptivity to this gift, in varying degrees . . . our failure to make it our own, to make it an authentically human act.

And let us be clear that our compromises with unbelief and sin will not bring peace, nor will they contribute to healing the wounds of sin and division all around us. Accepting and living the Gospel without compromise makes us one with Jesus and one his Church and her mission. This is how we become agents of "light, goodness,

order, and peace” in a divided and often rancorous culture. For us, as the family of the Knights of Columbus, our discipleship takes concrete form as we strive to live the principles of charity, unity, fraternity, and patriotism. Thus may we bear witness to Jesus! Thus may we be instruments of his peace! Vivat Jesus!

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