

### **Thirteenth Sunday in Pentecost 18 August 2013 'Not Peace, but Division'**

Let me open by apologising for not having time this week to spend with the readings and commentaries to prepare a homily. I was in Melbourne with dealing with a family medical crisis. However, I have put together a few simple thoughts around that tough gospel reading.

Firstly – thanks Jesus for those words of comfort, NOT! As our kids would say in the spirit of irony. When I hear them year after year, and when I DO have time to study them, I am left feeling even more uncomfortable. If part of your Christian faith is to read your Bible, pray and come to worship to maintain something of the status quo, to feel affirmed in doing things the way we've always done them, to curl up in a cocoon of comfort...well sorry folks, Jesus doesn't allow that to be the only way of expressing our faith.

He is a change agent, the harbinger of the Kingdom of a God – a mission plan so radical that it will tear families apart. Have you ever paused to wonder what happened to the disciple's families when they made the dangerous choice to lay down their nets and other professions and follow him? Ultimately they were all, with the possible exception of John killed for making that choice.

Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for Mary and Jesus' brothers when they tracked him down to offer food and sustenance only to get "Who are my mother and my brothers? Only those who do the will of my Father in heaven are my mother and my brothers"? Or what about when Simeon handed Jesus the 8 day-old baby back to Mary after his naming ceremony, and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and a sword will pierce your own soul"?

Jesus knew that the people who will often understand us the least, especially when we have transformative experiences (which our faith is supposed to provide us), are those closest to us. Remember, "A prophet is often not welcome in his home town"? These are tough truths, but it begs the question for me about the priority I give to my faith. I once had a spiritual director who asked me, "Are you falling more deeply in love with Jesus every day"? When I fall in love, there is no room for lukewarm commitment.

Secondly, in my experience as a priest, the number one excuse for not practicing faith is family commitments. Again, remember, "Sorry, I cannot come to the banquet, I have married a wife and bought me a cow". I don't know the answer to this one, we each have to discern it in our own way, but I'm pretty sure that radical discipleship calls us to challenge the structures of our society at every level, and to find ways to bring God into them.

Finally, in my travels this year as Director of Service Learning at CCGS, I have come across many different models of 'family' that need our support. My goal in taking school children to a number of Indigenous communities, an orphanage in Fiji, and to work with the children of Stueng Meanchay, the rubbish dump of Phnom Penh – is to open them up to their own privilege, to live with and face the realities of poverty, and to allow the beautiful people they meet to truly transform the way they see life so that in the years ahead they may continue to look for ways to make a difference. 3 people that challenged my life and ways that I view family this year were;

- sister Mele – Tongan nun, with her blunt honesty about the challenges of the religious life, but the sense of family the nuns create in the orphanage. And the circle at the centre...
- Earnest – 6yr old Burringurrah boy with grandparents doing their best, but desperate for male role models, and
- Tenisha, 8 yr old Looma girl eating dirt and caring for her 6yr old sister 1<sup>st</sup>...
- Scott Neeson and the family that CCF creates. 3 kids at the window waiting for grandma

Friends, let's sit with the tough readings and not avoid them. We all know the journey is hard at times and the call to be a disciple is radical. Let's celebrate all the good things about our families this morning while not walking away from the challenges Jesus sets today and every day

**Richard Pengelly**