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Father Cantalamessa on Division

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, AUG. 19, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from today's liturgy.

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I have come to bring division to the earth
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-57

This Sunday's Gospel reading contains some of the most provocative words ever spoken by Jesus: "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 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."

And to think that the person who pronounced these words was the same whose birth was greeted by the words: "Peace on earth to men of good will," and that during his life he proclaimed: "Blessed are the peacemakers." The same person, when he was arrested, commanded Peter to "Put your sword back into its sheath!" (Matthew 26:52). How do we explain this contradiction?

It is very simple. It is a matter of seeing which peace and unity Jesus came to bring and which is the peace and unity he came to take away. He came to bring the peace and unity of the good, that which leads to eternal life, and he came to take away the false peace and unity, which serves only to lull the conscience to sleep and leads to ruin.

It is not that Jesus came purposefully to bring division and war, but his coming inevitably brings division and contrast because he places people before a decision. And, faced with the necessity of making a decision, we know that human freedom will react in different ways. Jesus' word and person will bring to the surface that which is most hidden in the depths of the human heart. The elderly Simeon had predicted it, taking the baby Jesus in his arms: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35).

He himself will be the first victim of this contradiction, the first to suffer from the "sword" that he came to bring to the earth, he will give his life on account of it. After him the person most directly involved in this drama is Mary his mother, of whom Simeon says: "A sword will also pierce your soul."

Jesus himself distinguishes the two types of peace. He says to the apostles: "Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives peace do I give peace to you. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). After having destroyed with his death the false peace and solidarity of the human race

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in evil and sin, he inaugurates the new peace and unity that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is the peace that he offers to the disciples on Easter night, saying "Peace be with you!"

Jesus says that this "division" can also work its way into the family: between father and son, mother and daughter, brother and sister, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. And, unfortunately, we know that this is sometimes painfully true. The person who has found the Lord and seriously wants to follow him often finds himself in the difficult situation of having to choose: Either make those at home happy and neglect God and religious practice or follow the latter and put himself in conflict with his own, who give him trouble for every little thing he does for God and piety.

But the contrast penetrates even deeper, within the person himself, and it becomes a struggle between flesh and spirit, between the call to egoism and sensuality, and that of conscience. The division and conflict begin inside of us. Paul illustrated this marvelously: "For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want" (Galatians 5:17).

Man is attached to his little peace and freedom, even if it is precarious and illusory, and this image of Jesus who comes to bring disruption carries the risk of making us indisposed toward Christ, considering him as an enemy of our tranquility. It is necessary to overcome this impression and realize that this too is Jesus' love, perhaps the most pure and genuine love.

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