

“Called to discomfort!” Luke 12:49-56

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” “Wow! What is going on? What are you saying, Jesus?!” Did Jesus really say this? Maybe some of the eyewitnesses that Luke interviewed, got it wrong. Would Jesus really say: “I have come to bring division”?

It doesn't sound nice. What do you think? How does this saying make you feel? At peace, uneasy, disturbed? These challenging words of Jesus may help us to unearth some of those wrong assumptions that many Christians hold to be true.

I invite you to reflect on, **first**, how we think about the Church, why is she here? **Second**, on what does Jesus teach us with these harsh words? **Third**, on why does Jesus ask so much from us?

So, first, how do we think about the Church and what do we expect? What is the Church about? How would you answer? Interestingly, we often have similar ideas and hopes as Jesus' audience back then. We are not that different.

They obviously were hoping that Jesus will bring them peace and comfort, that everything will be fine and nothing will be left to worry about. Isn't this what we all long for? Even more, isn't that what the entire world wants?

On the one hand, sure, there is nothing wrong with those hopes. Those are good things, worth to be strived for. Except that for us, Christians, they shouldn't be on our priority list. At least, not now. We will have all of that and so much more, more than we are capable to comprehend, but... not in this age. Not in this life.

However, if that is what we hope for and how we understand what the Church is and why she is here, then we will gladly embrace the picture where the Church is mainly about the nice community of friendly people, who want to live in peace and hopefully also care for one another.

Isn't that a heart-warming picture? We could even use the familiar phrase: "Where love comes to life." But can you tell me, how then are we different from any other community? Isn't that what every community is after? Do we as Christians have copyrights to peace and mutual support, how are we unique?

It seems that here our Lord is trying to teach us something profound. He may be even suggesting a different motto to consider for His Church: "Where Jesus brings division." How about that? Could it be that the desire for peace and comfort and our well-being has little to do with what the Church is about?

Could it be that that is what everyone in this fallen world dreams about? Could it be that to see the Church primarily in that way is nothing else but a wishful thinking of the old Adam in us? Could it even be that the Church's main mission is something else, not our peace and comfort? Could it be that our understandable desire for peace and comfort actually hinders us from the main mission why we are here?

Let's move to our second question – **what is Jesus teaching us with these harsh sayings?** What is He teaching about His Church? Now, who was Jesus? Why did He come? How do we confess it every Sunday?

"The only-begotten Son of God... God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God... **who for us and for our salvation** came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate."

"For us and for our salvation!" Jesus' mission wasn't a sightseeing tour. "Come and experience the beauty of the earth!" It wasn't a friendly visit. It was a military operation, a battle, a rescue mission, which involved violent and bloody confrontation with our ultimate enemies, with sin and death and devil.

Deadly confrontation. Jesus came to free us from the captivity to sin, to pull us out of the jaws of death, to save us from eternal destruction, to liberate us from the deceptive spell of the father of lies, the devil. That was Jesus' mission.

He succeeded; the enemy was defeated. The war was won, but local battles will continue to rage till the end of this age, until the day Jesus comes once again, this time in His divine glory to bring forth His New Creation, New Heavens and New Earth.

But in the meantime, He left His body, the Church, His holy people, His faithful disciples to continue His mission. As the Holy Spirit put it so well, Jesus is sending us

“to open people’s eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus Christ].” (Acts 26:18)

How about this picture? This is not about our peace and comfort being the highest goal, where we expect our God to take care of our wants. Just think about the fate of all the apostles, the hostility they encountered, the deaths they died.

Following Jesus seems to be more about us being called out of our comfort zones, being forced to reconsider our priorities, dying to ourselves, being involved into this cosmic rescue mission which involves confrontation with the dark forces.

Surely, we may prefer the first picture, the sugar coated, relaxed, funny, inclusive, tolerant, friendly, easy going, “no worries, mate!” Christianity – that false and dying deformation of Christianity – but here Jesus calls us to something different.

Here the Triune God invades your life, He rescues you from the bondage to darkness and death, He sacrifices Himself fully, He redeems you, He gives you a new life and now He expects your absolute loyalty, commitment and obedience.

He invites you to share His journey, the greatest and most dangerous adventure that there is, the greatest rescue operation in the history of the Universe. Forget about your comfort and about your peace, forget about your preferences and about your desires.

There is something infinitely greater going on, and you can be part of it. If we love anyone or anything more than Jesus, we are not fit for His mission. If we value our comfort and nice and superficial peace in our relationships more than Jesus, we have got wrong allegiances, we are not fit for His mission.

But if we truly believe what we say we believe as Christians, what is then our greatest treasure, what is that one thing we fear to lose more than anything? Eternal life with our God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Where then is our main focus? What do we then strive for with all our heart? To keep the faith, to fear, love and trust our Triune God, to please Him. What is then the greatest gift that we can give to people in our lives?

Yes, the gift of eternal life, which we can deliver them by telling them about Jesus Christ. What then is the most loving thing we can do for others? To speak to them the pure Gospel, the life-creating words of eternal life.

Then we care for the Gospel, we gladly and courageously stand against all false teachings, even if it costs our peace. If we truly believe what we say we believe, these are our highest priorities, these are our ultimate allegiances.

Our God, eternal life, Jesus' rescue mission and the pure teaching of the Gospel which brings this new life. Everything else, including our peace and comfort are far less important. And you know how it works from your own experience.

We gladly sacrifice something we believe to be less important, so that we can enjoy what is more important. For example, if our peace and comfort are our priorities, then we won't worry about the truth of the Gospel, or our faithfulness to God, or our participation in His mission. Why bother! For they do bring divisions.

It's not that we don't cherish peace in our relationships, especially in the Church, Jesus doesn't instruct us to be divisive. The very opposite, the Spirit teaches us to **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."** (Rom 12:18)

However, despite our best efforts, everyone who is still dead in their sins is hostile to Jesus. They can't tolerate the message of truth. They can't accept that our ultimate allegiance is to Jesus, even over our family relationships, even over our comfort and peace. And that does divide, whatever painful it is.

I am sure many of us have experienced it in our own lives, in our own families. That may hurt and does hurt deeply. Thus, we came to our final question – **why does Jesus ask so much from us?** The answer is shockingly simple. He doesn't.

That's right. He doesn't. Let's briefly consider two reasons why this is true. First, our ultimate allegiance. We are to fear, love and trust our God above all things. Consider this, if there is someone whom you love more than anything, what would you be willing to do for them? We know it from our experience. Anything!

You meet your spouse, and you happily give up your time with your family. You want to spend every minute with your love. When a baby is born, loving mother happily gives up her time with friends or hobbies, just to spend more time with the precious little being. We know how it works.

Would you consider it as a toil or sacrifice if you are invited to go on adventure with the love of your life, with the most precious person in your life? Or would you consider it a privilege and joy, a fulfilment of your dreams?

This is how Jesus approached His mission. There was a cup of God's wrath and destruction to be poured upon the fallen and corrupt humanity. The fire from heaven was aimed and launched to destroy everything sinful. Everyone sinful.

But then... Jesus chose to stand in its way. To stand in our place. That fire, meant for me and you, it fell upon Jesus on the cross. He feared what was to come, He knew what the cost of this baptism on the cross will be, He desperately wanted it to be over.

Still, there was no doubt in His mind about committing to His mission. He did it for someone whom He loved more than Himself, He did it for the love of His life, for His beloved Bride, the Church, He did it for you. Even as we were still His enemies.

That was difficult. That was unpleasant. Not what He invites us to do. We don't need to fear, the fire of God's wrath is not coming at us, we won't need to suffer what Jesus suffered. We are simply to receive the fruits of His labour and tell everyone about this amazing God, who has done all of this. For us. And for them.

Now the second reason why this is not a burdensome task is this. Yes, Jesus says that if we are loyal to Him, that may bring divisions even in our families, even with those who are the closest to us according to flesh. We know that is true.

However, even if we may experience divisions in our families, and some relationships may be complete lost, there is something we need to know. When the Triune God calls you, He brings you into His family and He gives you amazing Christian friends.

Countless multitudes of them. He gives you a new family, of whom you didn't even know. But, yes, we share the same Father who is in heaven. We share the same brother, Jesus Christ, who serves us beyond our comprehension.

You are united with this new family, with countless people around the world and across the time, with the most intimate bond, by the Holy Spirit of God indwelling in you. You are made one with all people of God. There are so many who are overjoyed to embrace you, to care for you, to pray for you, because of this deepest bond.

You share with your new siblings the most important things. You are loved by the same God, you are called to participate in the same grand adventure, you experience the same joy of the Gospel, you are passionate for everyone to get to know this God.

And, the truth to be told, you have peace. Not a worldly peace, but the peace that the world and our own attempts can't give us. The peace which surpasses all our understanding, the peace that comes from Jesus' presence with you, the peace that is a foretaste for what is to come.

So, yes, may our good Lord help us to get the correct picture of what His Church is about and what an amazing privilege it is to be a part of the body of Christ, the beloved Bride of Jesus Christ.

Let's seek the Kingdom of God first, and then all the others things, peace and comfort and countless people who love you, all of that will be added to you.

Amen.