

[St. Mark has a simple but effective technique to structure events in Christ's life. He'll take two very different stories in which Jesus makes the same point and sandwich one inside the other. That's exactly what Mark does today with an episode about the Lord's divine authority questioned *sandwiched* in one about Christ's authentic family. So let's examine the first and then end with the second to understand Jesus' point.]

First, the Jewish scribes doubt Christ's credentials to exorcise demons. The scribes were Bible scholars, but Jesus was a carpenter – a mere craftsman without schooling or prophetic pedigree. But Jesus quickly refutes their accusation that He drives out demons by being possessed Himself, logically asking why Satan would be self-destructive? This squabble gives the Lord the chance to discuss what the nature of **division** and **unity** are in the Kingdom of God.

So what is the *nature* of division? Is it evil? Well, Christ says the devil's minions are unanimous in evil goals! *Evil unity* is bad! Christ says elsewhere He did not come to bring peace but division: pitting brother against brother, son against father, and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law. (Although, in my experience mothers-in-law don't need Jesus for that!) The gospel sometimes means making choices that divide the strongest bonds of blood. Yet, Christ also brings peace, but a peace, He states, "not as the world gives it" (cf. Jn. 14:27). What is the world's peace? It's a momentary absence of conflict, and in our *me-first* attitudes we'll always try to leave it. *Christ's peace* differs because it's a stability we never want to leave; everything may be crashing around us but we stand firm in the Lord. Christ's peace may come at the cost of division.

That's not to say that any old division is holy! The opposite of Christ is our first family, Adam and Eve. Today we see the fallout of Original Sin. The Garden of Eden

was true peace, perfect unity between God and creation. But man and woman are tempted by the serpent to believe they are in competition with their Creator. And when this false competition is established it explodes. Once God cared for Adam and Eve like a father, but now they're rebellious kids. Once Adam saw Eve as his compliment and best companion, but now she's a threat to his power. Once the man named the animals and lived harmoniously with them, now they fear each other. Division may be necessary separate from evil's united front, but divisiveness, *that* is evil. Sin sets us in false competition with God, neighbor, and creation.

So that's about as clear as mud, huh?! How do we discern **good division** from **divisiveness**? Well, the demons, Christ says, are focused on doing Satan's will. Conversely, we, directed by the Holy Spirit, should seek God's will. So we must avoid what's popular in our culture now: to make no distinctions at all! Everything is equally as bad or equally as good as anything else. Thus even a prominent priest can say that *all lifestyles* are sinful. No, as individuals we sin, but heterosexual marriage and priesthood are paths to holiness, whereas a gay union is a road to perdition. And we should avoid thinking the middle of two extremes is good. Napalm and dry ice evened out won't make fluffy bunnies! Two wrongs mixed rarely make a right. How do we discern what to do, then? We discern in relation to Christ. We look to the Word of God, Jesus' own example, and the Church's teaching to model when to sever and when to unite. The Lord says, those who love mother and father more than me are not worthy of me, but He also says forgive seven times seventy times.

Christ tells us Satan defeats us when we're divided by sin – selfishness, hatred, and doubt. Unity in God's kingdom will come about by acting on God's will. There's an

overarching will for all: to be holy, *for all to be saints!* But within the Church we will fulfill His will through our different vocations and individually. There's diversity in the Spirit but it's all guided to God's will. It's like an orchestra. If you've ever heard them tuning up, playing randomly to themselves, seeking their own ends – it's just noise. But when the conductor focuses different instruments playing different notes into one score – it's a beautiful symphony! Just so, the Church, who though many is one, must be in harmony of purpose for the Gospel.

[Now, I said that this story of division and unity was sandwiched between a second about Jesus' family. Let's treat that briefly. Christ seems to snub Mary and other relatives who think he's erratic. And perhaps your polite but anti-Catholic neighbor would say: "Here's proof you Catholics are wrong about Mary!" However, in the Acts of the Apostles we're told that the Disciples were not alone awaiting the Holy Spirit to send them to do God's will, but Mary and Jesus' family were there praying too (cf. Acts 1:13-14). *What do we make of that?* Well, first off, why would God create the family as the cell of society, and secondly, choose Mary in the fullness of time to be the Mother of the Savior if He didn't want to use them for His Church? The Lord's **natural family** later becomes part of His *spiritual family*. The Church is an intentional family, often made up of *families*, and it's necessarily familial. Why? Because you did not obtain good table manners automatically, but rather, were formed by your family. Because you did not learn how to share by divine inspiration, but rather, formed by your family. And in the same way, the Church is a new family – forming you in faith, morals, and prayer – in order to do God's will. Without the Church-family we're divided from divine purpose. This is the context for discernment, as Abbot John Chapman writes about those who have

made this place their true home: “The one thing you should gain by quiet prayer is to feel the rest of the day that you want God’s Will and nothing else” (*The Spiritual Letters of Dom John Chapman* 36).]