



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
** Knights of Malta **

April
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Chancellor's Update

Matthew 10

This issue was brought to our attention by a twelve-year-old young man who needed an explanation. We, therefore, went to the Fathers of the Church for its meaning. Matt. 10, v.34-36.

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

Jerome: He had before said, “What I say to you in darkness, that speak ye in the light;” He now tells them what will follow upon that preaching, saying, “Think not that I am come to send peace upon earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword.”

Chrys., Hom. xxxv: How then did He enjoin them, that when they should enter any house they should say, “Peace be to this house,” as also the Angels sung, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace to men.” [Luke 2:14] That is the most perfect peace when that which is diseased is lopped off, when that which introduces strife is taken away, for so only is it possible that heaven should be joined to earth. For so does the physician save the rest of the body, namely by cutting off that which cannot be healed. So, it came to pass at the tower of Babel; a happy discord broke up their bad union. So also, Paul divided those who were conspired together against him. For concord is not in all cases good; for there is honor among thieves. And this combat is not of His setting before them, but of the plots of the world.

Jerome: For in the matter of belief in Christ, the whole world was divided against itself; each house had its believers and its unbelievers; and therefore, was this holy war sent, that an unholy peace might be broken through.

Chrys.: This He said as it were comforting His disciples, as much as to say, Be not troubled as though these things fell upon you unexpectedly; for this cause I came that I might send war upon the earth - nay He says not ‘war,’ but what is yet harder, “a sword.” For He sought by sharpness of speech so to rouse their attention, that they should not fall off in time of trial and difficulty; or say that He had told them smooth things, and had hid the difficulties. For it is better to meet with softness in deeds than in words; and therefore He stayed not in words, but shewing them the nature of their warfare, He taught them that it was more perilous than a civil war; saying, “I am come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” So, this warfare will be between not acquaintances merely, but the nearest and dearest kindred; and this shews Christ’s very great power; that His disciples after having heard this, yet undertook the mission, and brought over others.

Yet was it not Christ who made this division, but the evil nature of the parties; when He says that it is, He that does it, He speaks according to the manner of Scripture. As it is written, “God hath

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given them eyes that they should not see.” [Isa 6:10] Here is also a great proof that the Old Testament is like the New. For among the Jews a man was to put his neighbor to death if he found him making a calf, or sacrificing to Baalphegor; so here to shew that it was the same God who ordained both that and these precepts, He reminds them of the prophecy, “A man’s foes are they of his household.” For this same thing happened among the Jews; there were Prophets, and false Prophets; there the multitude was divided, and houses were set against themselves; there some believed one part, and some another.

Jerome: These are almost the words of the Prophet Micah. [Mic 7:6] We should always take note when a passage is cited out of the Old Testament, whether the sense only, or the very words are given.

Hilary: Mystically, a sword is the sharpest of all weapons, and thence it is the emblem of the right of authority, the impartiality of justice, the correction of offenders. The word of God, we may remember, is likened to a sword; [margin note: Eph 6:17, Heb 4:12] so here the sword that is sent upon the earth is His preaching poured into the heart of man. The five inhabiting one house, whom He divides three against two, and two against three, we may explain thus; The three are the three parts of man, the body, the soul, and the will; for as the soul is bestowed in the body, so the will has power of using both in any way it chooses; and thence when a law is given it is given to the will. But this is only found in those who were first formed by God. By the sin and unbelief of the first parent, all the generations of men since have had sin for the father of their body, and unbelief for the mother of their soul. And as each man has his will within him, there are thus five in one house.

When then we are renewed in the laver of baptism, by virtue of the word we are set apart from our original guilt, and severed, as it were, by the sword of God, from the lusts of this our father and mother, and thus there is great discord made in one house; the new man finding his foes within, he seeks with joy to live in newness of spirit; they which are derived from the old stock, lust to remain in their old pleasures.

Aug., Quaest in Matt., q.3: Otherwise, “I am come to set a man against his father;” for he renounces the Devil who was his son; “the daughter against her mother,” that is, the people of God against the city of the world, that is, the wicked society of mankind, which is spoken of in Scripture under the names of Babylon, Egypt, Sodom, and other names.

“The daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,” that is, the Church against the Synagogue, which according to the flesh, brought forth Christ the spouse of the Church. They are severed by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. “And a man’s foes are they of his household,” those, that is, with whom he before lived as intimates.

Raban.: For no other mutual rights can be preserved between those who are at war in their creeds.

Gloss: Otherwise; He mean, I am not come among men to strengthen their carnal affections, but to cut them off with the sword of the Spirit; whence it is rightly added, “And a man’s foes are they of his household.” (The theology in this issue of fallen man and redemption is very deep. It may have to be reread many times.)

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