

Did anyone at home ever give you this advice: "I don't care what you do, just keep peace in the family"? Does that sound familiar? Now, let me translate that for you.

You would think that "to keep peace" means "to maintain the peace which is there." But here it usually means, "We all know there is no peace: There is division. So let's pretend that peace is there. We all know Uncle Howie cheated us out of Grandma's millions. We all know Cousin Beth sleeps with anything that moves except her husband. We all know Pop never did like Ma's meatloaf, which he feeds to the dog, who spits it out on the back porch. But whatever you do, just keep peace in the family. Pretend that it's there."

Parish families suffer division, too. There's a parish in Minnesota right now where the division among its members is so deep that the bishop has taken away their priest until the people straighten things out.

At St. Regis we are blessed to enjoy a community at peace. But even here you'll find divisions. You'll find people who disagree with some changes in the Church; they wish we'd listen to them. You'll find people who don't get along with members of our staff; they wish we'd work on public relations. You'll find families who tithe upset with families who don't; they wish everyone would pull their own weight.

Divisions in the parish and divisions in the family embarrass people. If parents shout at each other, they don't want the kids to hear. If you throw someone out, you don't want the neighbors to watch. If you divorce, you hide. You're afraid to go public, afraid that everyone at church will stare at you.

The reason divisions embarrass is that we've made peace number one. Peace is on Christmas cards, banners, and bumper stickers. The president wants peace. The pope wants peace. So, if a two-year old starts crying, people wonder, "Have I failed as a parent?" If teens can't get along with their families they wonder, "What went wrong? Why did everybody change?"

Surely Jesus startled his apostles when he told them, "I did not come to establish peace on the earth. I assure you, the contrary is true: I have come for division."

Jesus implies there is a value higher than peace. Peace is not number one. Following Jesus is number one. Doing the will of God is number one. And sometimes that will shatter peace.

Jesus does not praise division. Division is not greater than peace. Following Jesus is greater than peace. Following Jesus may cause division in families or in parishes. But it will also instill a deep peace of mind in the midst of conflict and division.

If people break peace between themselves, they can still create peace within themselves--if they follow Christ.