

08/18/13 20 C

-- I suspect this is a weekend most preachers in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches dread. This is not the image of Jesus we are comfortable with. We want the Prince of Peace, not the one who came for division.

-- Right now we live in a culture of divisions. Congress seems more divided than anytime most of us older people can remember. Cable TV allows us to watch only the news that fits our political leanings. And even the Church seems to have similar divisions within itself.

-- Many people are sick and tired of this type of divisiveness. Is this what Jesus was talking about when he said he came for division?

-- Not at all. Jesus wasn't interested in picking fights in order to get people riled up. But he did have a message to convey, and he knew that his message was not what everyone wanted to hear. And he was not going to back off from doing his Father's will.

-- This week I concelebrated the funeral of Fr. Bernie Boff. Some of you may remember I talked about him a few weeks ago in the homily. Fr. Boff had a great sense of mission, and was director of the Mission Office of our diocese for many years.

-- Back when he was a young priest, he was stationed at my home parish of St. Patrick, Heatherdowns. In 1965, he (and a few other priests of our diocese) went down to Selma, Alabama, to march for voting rights for people of all races.

-- Some people in our parish were not pleased to say the least. They wanted him to stay home---this was none of his business. Those included my parents, who liked him personally and had welcomed him to my home. But he stood up for what he believed was right.

-- In the fall of 1967, Bishop Donovan had been in Toledo less than a year. He had tried to promote a spirit of unity while implementing the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

-- That fall an Open Housing Ordinance was on the ballot in Toledo, to prevent discrimination in housing loans. He came out strongly for it. But

he faced strong opposition in a number of Catholic parishes, and even from some pastors. He was standing up for what he believed was right.

-- When we take a stand in conscience, whether on abortion, the death penalty, immigration reform, rights of conscience and religious freedom, or whatever moral issue... we risk division. Like Jeremiah and the other prophets, we may risk opposition, even violence at times.

-- Yes, it would be easier to be a Church which is like a cruise ship, offering whatever we want in the way of entertainment, food, activities, without disturbing anyone with different beliefs.

-- But, as one wise person said, the Church is not a cruise ship but a rescue boat. It reaches out to save those in danger of being lost. It provides healing medicine for those in need of it. But it does not cater to our every desire, especially if those desires are contrary to the gospel message.

-- Jesus Christ came to save the world from sin and death. He came with a message from his heavenly Father, and he was faithful to that message. As he headed toward Jerusalem, he could see the writing on the wall. He knew that message would cause division among those who were not willing to accept it.

-- Even so, he carried that message, right to his death on the cross. Over the centuries, thousands of his followers have literally followed him to the cross or the equivalent form of death of their own time.

-- So we should not be surprised if, in our efforts to be faithful to the Lord and his Word, we face some opposition. We're not picking fights; we are simply being faithful stewards of God's message.