

Item #108 (On the Elimination of Tribes)

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have come to bring not peace but a sword. For I came to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Thus, a person’s enemies will be members of his own family. Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10,34-38). “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze. There is a baptism I still must receive, and I am still under constrain until it is brought to completion” (Luke 12,49-50). What is at stake here are not simply family relations, but family relations under a certain formality, as mention of the cross indicates. This formality would seem to be family relationships as members of a family in the system of the twelve tribes. And the elimination of tribes is in connection with the New Law, and the heart of the New Law is a result of Christ’s cross and the essence of Christ’s mission: the Eucharist as the sign of Christ’s blazing love.

Christ came to replace the Old Covenant with the New and thus, among other things, to replace the system of tribes that were so important until the Twelve Apostles were chosen by Jesus to replace the Twelve Tribes and by their number signal the relation of fulfillment that marks the coming of Jesus and His role of fulfilling. With their being appointment by Jesus, the Twelve Apostles were called to celibacy, a quality of life that has been the distinctive mark of Catholic clergy when lived as the Apostles lived.

The Gospels have abundant evidence of the relation of Jesus to his Father (see Matthew 14,23, for example). It is a special relation, distinct from the relation of Jesus to His fellow humans. It is a love that never had a beginning and will never have an end. It is the relation of Father and Son

that is so powerful that it is a Person: the Holy Spirit (see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §237). This is a special love which celibacy is making possible for the Apostles selected by Jesus. It is a love that enables the Apostles and those who share in their priesthood, to love the Father as Jesus loved Him. It is a love that is eternal because Father and Son are eternal. It is distinct from the love between man and woman that facilitates the temporal reproduction of the human race. It is this human love that is so easy to come by in contrast to the celibacy bestowed by Jesus at His call. By its nature, celibacy makes possible a love that transcends human sex. It is unfortunate (but understandable) that human love demands so much effort to control, while celibacy receives so little attention in relation to its merits. (**James Swetnam, S.J., November 28, 2023**)