

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Divide and conquer is a proven problem-solving strategy. It's used for all sorts of complex problems. It's used in computer programming — modern programs require millions of lines of code. That can't be done apart from this strategy. It's a strategy Caesar employed to rule the Roman Empire, and Napoleon in his pursuit of his empire. Machiavelli applied it as a military strategy, advising ... *“that a Captain should endeavor with every art to divide the forces of the enemy,”* causing him to *“become weaker.”* And all this is with the purpose of conquering and ruling.

It's the way many predators work in nature. The predator(s) separate one animal out of a flock or herd, overwhelm, and destroy it. Satan and the enemies of the church employ the same technique. Jesus calls *“false prophets” “ravenous wolves”* (Matt. 7:15), and the *“wolf snatches ... and scatters”* the flock (Jn 10:12). St. Paul similarly warns: *“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them”* (Acts 20:29-30). Divide and conquer.

Thus, our *“adversary the devil”* is compared to *“a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Satan will use whatever he can to weaken Christians, to divide and conquer them, including the *“fiery trial.”* *“Resist him, firm in your faith,”* says St. Peter. *“Entrust [your] souls to a faithful Creator.”* *“Cast all your anxieties on [God], [knowing that] he cares for you.”*

By the way, it's not just false teachers within the church — also outside of her. Writing to the Colossians, St. Paul encourages believers to stay rooted in Christ, in His word. He warns, *“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ”* (Col. 2:8). And whenever deceit is employed, you can know that the devil, who is called by Scripture *“the deceiver of the whole world,”* is at work (Rev. 12:9).

The devil is at work through college professors trying to divide young, impressionable students from their church and families with inane comments like *“Belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion, since it devalues actual lives and discourages action that would make them longer, safer, and happier,”* as Harvard professor of psychology Steven Pinker wrote recently on Twitter. Actually, knowing that we already have the victory in Christ frees Christians from paralyzing fear to serve. The devil is at work through troublemakers trying to divide us up in church based on race or sex or age or politics. Regardless, the goal is the same: divide and conquer.

I received a call the other day asking about Luther and his translation of the Bible. The accusation was that Luther, the supposed Jew-hater, left the word “Israel” out of his translation. Well, we know Luther had some harsh things to say about the unbelieving Jews, rhetoric we condemn, but this accusation — an attempt to separate out this sheep from the flock — is false and outrageous.

You’ve probably heard of this attempt to try to divide Jesus from the Father. “Oh sure, the Old Testament condemns homosexuality, but Jesus never said anything about that,” trying to pitting the Old Testament against the New. As if Jesus didn’t say, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*” As if He didn’t say, “*Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5:17, 19). Or they’ll pit Jesus against Paul. They try to divide the house that Jesus built and set it against itself, so that it will not stand (Matt. 12:25).

But Jesus, in His High Priestly prayer in our Gospel, is having none of it. “*Holy Father,*” He prays, “*keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*” There is a unity within the Holy Trinity, and so in the Church that confesses it. Oh, to be sure, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons within the Godhead of the Trinity, but they are one in essence, one in will, one in purpose. “*We are one,*” Jesus says.

So the Father glorifies the Son so that the Son might glorify the Father. The Son glorifies the Father by doing the Father’s will and accomplishing the work that the Father gave the Son—our rescue. The Father glorifies the Son by accepting His sacrifice for our sin, raising the Son from the dead, welcoming Him back into the heavenly realm, now with flesh. Man with God taking His place at the Father’s right hand, even that flesh receives the glory He had even before the creation.

Without division, the Father and the Son work to bring about our salvation. Authority over all flesh is given to the Son, who Himself became flesh, so that He might earn our salvation by His cross and passion, so that He might give eternal life to all those whom the Father had given Him. “*And this is eternal life,*” prays Jesus: “*that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”

There is no division here between the Father and the Son. “*I am in the Father and the Father is in me*” (Jn 14:11). You want to know the Father? Look to the Son whom He has sent. “*If you had known me, you would have known my Father also,*” Jesus said (Jn 14:7). You want to go to the Father? The only way to the Father is through the Son (Jn 14:6), who came from the Father (Jn 16:28) and was sent by Him (Jn 6:38). You want to see the Father? Look again to the Son:

*“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”* (Jn 14:9). *“From now on you do know him and have seen him”*—in the Son (Jn 14:7)! *“I speak the words the Father gives me,”* Jesus says (Jn 14:24). *“I do the works the Father has given me”* (Jn 14:10). *“All mine are yours, and yours are mine,”* Jesus prays to the Father.

Therefore, be gone, Satan, with all your minions who seek to divide the Church and conquer. The Father and Jesus are not divided; their word is united, Old and New Testaments, Jesus and Paul: All Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16), who is One, and that word endures forever (1 Pet 1:25). Get behind US, we say to Satan, for we by baptism have become one with Christ, incorporated into Him (1 Cor 12:12-13), and therefore are One with the Spirit and the Father. As St. Paul teaches, *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”* (Eph 4:4-6).

To be sure, Satan is still prowling about in our lives—in the midst of this pandemic, he is still prowling about, seeking to divide, conquer and devour us, pitting the government against the church, sending law enforcement to fine churches and ticket churchgoers, even moving some to burn churches down. Oh, and did you see the political cartoon in the Journal Gazette on Saturday? You faithful are here to prey—not p-r-a-y, but p-r-e-y—on each other, or others outside church; it’s not clear; or perhaps your shepherd is preying on you! Whatever, it’s one more attempt to separate you from the flock—divide and conquer.

But, let not your hearts be troubled. Satan may not be toothless—the fiery trials may not be pleasant—but Satan has been defeated by the united work of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this God, *“the God of all grace,”* is with us. *“The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon [us].”* Christ prays for us. Ascended to the right hand of the Father, He, who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, also advocates for us. And He assures us that He *“who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever.”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen. Alleluia!