

We had some wonderful readings this evening, offering plenty of scope for reflection. I'd like us to concentrate on the First Reading and the Gospel.

Our first reading took us right back to the Biblical account of the beginning of the human race, where Adam and Eve had just taken their first bite out of the forbidden fruit. They hear God strolling in the Garden towards them, and fearful of what He might say or do, they hide. The first consequence of eating from the forbidden fruit is already showing itself, - division had started. It soon shows up in other ways when Adam blames Eve for his failure to live up to God's desire, and Eve follows suit by passing the buck to the snake.

The Gospel picks that up in two ways, - first of all by the response the Scribes and Pharisees make to the teaching of Jesus and the miracles of healing and casting out demons which Jesus worked. These should have alerted them to the presence of God in what Jesus did, but instead they accuse him of being in league with Beelzebul, with Satan; - that it is through Satans doing that Jesus is able to achieve these results.

Jesus counters their claim with the story of how a kingdom divided against itself cannot hope to survive, but they have no ears for that, so division again asserts itself.

While this is going on a delegation of family members arrived outside. They'd heard about all the activities Jesus had engaged in, and the resulting disturbance this brought about, particularly with the religious authorities. They felt they could do without this kind of notoriety, and were intent on bringing him back to Nazareth, where they could insist in him sticking to the work he was accustomed to do, being the village carpenter, and not make a fool of himself, and of them as well.

When Jesus was told they were outside he didn't react or respond as we might have. Instead of going out to them he turned to those inside and ask a rhetorical question: "Who are my mother and brothers and sisters?" and looking at the circle around him, including his recently chosen Apostles, he

said: "Here are my mother and sisters and brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is brother and sister and mother to me."

That may look like a rather dismissive response at first, but when you reflect upon it you recognise how profound it is. In saying what Jesus did say, He is telling those sitting around him that his family is larger than his blood relatives, is larger than his particular religion, language or ethnic group, larger than Israel or any other country that can be named.

His family are those who do the will of God, and beyond that no other criterion is required.

Yet, that statement has enormous implications for each one of us. That criterion brings us back to the situation before Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, before any division took place, and we can see the evidence right here.

If you don't mind, I'd like to invite our young adults to come from wherever they are, here to the front of the altar, please, and face the people in the seats, so I can ask you a couple of questions.

What is your name and where do you come from, - which countries?

And: What brings you together here from all these different places?

Is it because doing God's will is at the heart of your gatherings, your praying, your praising, your singing and playing, your work, and your service to the community in general? Isn't it that through these efforts of working and growing together, you are undoing the effects of that original sin? Building God's Kingdom, and enlarging your family by recognising that each person we meet is brother or sister to Christ, and to us?

And, isn't that why you are here as well?