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Reflection: Mk. 3:22-30
Jan. 23, 2023

On this Monday morning, we are in the third week of ordinary time, and amid the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is also the annual day of prayer for the legal protection of the unborn. In today's Gospel, the Scribes are increasingly antagonized by Jesus and anxious to be rid of him. They have decided that he is possessed by Beelzebul. That is probably sincere on the part of some and said out of jealousy on the part of others.

I remember hearing the phrase "O my Beelzebul", which appears in this Gospel, used many years ago. This was my dad, talking to my brother. There was no problem. And, I didn't have a clue about who Beelzebul was. I think my Baptist Dad, well versed in Scripture, was just having fun with his Catholic kids. "O my Beelzebul..." he would say.

But this charge brought against Jesus, insisting that he was possessed by Beelzebul, was not used in humor. It was levelled against him by the scribes, experts in Scripture, who had come from Jerusalem. It was a grave charge. Jesus, they said, casts out devils "by Beelzebul" the prince of demons. That's not a very logical argument when you think about it, but that's what they said. They were desperate to discredit Jesus and prove that he was not from God. To retain their authority, they needed to discredit Jesus.

Nevertheless, this text of the kingdom...the house, divided against itself, clearly makes a point. Our world, our newscasts, our lives, are filled with reports of nations, political parties, and families divided, destroyed from within by festering antagonisms. Jesus counters this, reminding us that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Divisive ideas and attitudes must be recognized and dealt with; they don't just "go away".

During 100 years of celebrating this week of prayer for Christian unity, great progress has been made, but there are distances to go. Coming to know one another, has allowed respect to grow. Together we can seek ever greater truth.

As today's Gospel teaches, it is the Spirit who can and will lead us. As the letter to the Hebrews indicates, Christ is the Mediator of a new Covenant, directing our way.

