

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 25th January 2026 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Err.... How can Jesus have said that? (1)

Are there times when you have heard something attributed to Jesus in the Gospel and wondered how He could have said such a thing, or at least what He really meant? In this series of articles I will explore some passages which have struck me in this way.

The first is a lengthy extract at Matthew 10:34-39. I cannot reproduce all of it, but a key section is: *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father.....He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.."*

How does the statement of Him coming to bring a sword, not peace and to 'set a man against his father' fit in? It is not the normal perception we have of Jesus. This perception is evident from His title as 'Prince of Peace', and throughout His conduct during the Passion; it is encapsulated, for example, in St Paul's words (Ephesians 2:14): "For He is our peace".

There is a strong consensus among scholars as to the proper interpretation of this passage. I will try to summarise it.

The expectation of the Jewish people was that the arrival of the Messiah would bring peace to the world. This is apparent, for example, in the well-known passage in Isaiah 2:4, "...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares...nation shall not lift up sword against nation..". In Matthew Chapter 10, Jesus starts by telling His disciples to go out and preach. He warns them that many will not accept them and there will be strife (*"..Beware of men...you will be hated by all for my sake.. do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul..."*). The context of the whole chapter, therefore, is warning the disciples that the hostile reception of men is a necessary step on the road to the universal peace which will come in due time, and which we still await.

Jesus makes it clear that the animosity of men to His message means that the consequence of His word will be strife, even if His word and teaching is one of peace. Even close relatives may turn against those who follow His message of truth and peace. As one commentator puts it: *"The wickedness of men, and not the religion of the Gospel, is the cause of this*

hostility...no prophecy has been more strikingly fulfilled; and it will continue to be fulfilled until all unite in obeying His commandments...".

One other possibility is that 'sword' is not a weapon but a metaphor for the Gospel itself. The Gospel is rejected by many. It thus separates the people of Christ from those who reject Him. Jesus warns that, though it is not His intention to bring discord, this will be the effect of His teaching because of the wrongdoing of those who do not follow Him.

Stephen S.