

Ellie Singer

I speak to you in the name of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

8/17/2025

Raise your hand if you're going to school this year! That's so exciting!

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I'm going to school too. I'm in seminary, which means I'm going to school to become a priest like Father Charles. I'm so excited to start school this fall - there are a ton of new classmates to meet, and teachers to learn from. I'm starting the 19th grade! What grade are you in?

I brought my backpack with me for the blessing. Backpacks are important because they hold everything we need. What kinds of things do you keep in your backpack?

Backpacks make it easier to carry everything - books, pencils, lunch. Which is a huge blessing because school can be exciting, but it can also be really tough, and we can use all the help we can get.

One thing I find really hard about school starting again is change. Change can be really scary!

I had to move away from my family to go to school here in Virginia. Maybe you don't go to school in another state, but maybe you need to say goodbye to someone every morning. Maybe your big change is a new teacher. Maybe it's a whole new school!

Maybe you're even going back to school after a first career and you're out of depth. That's probably not for the grade schoolers here, unless one of y'all kids is a secret doctor.

But no matter what, a new year of school is a big change.

One thing I've noticed about big change, or transitions - new situations and places - one thing you might have noticed too, is when there is a big change, that can lead to big emotions. You have to say goodbye to what you're used to.

That's what Jesus is talking about in the Gospel story today. He tells his friends something they probably don't want to hear. He says that he's not bringing peace. Instead, Jesus is bringing division. Parents against their children, children against their parents.

What does division mean?

Division is when people are separated from each other, when they're in conflict, when they disagree. Does division feel good? No, I don't think so. Then why is Jesus bringing division?

Well, I think Jesus is asking his friends to change, and that's really hard. Sometimes, change brings division because you have to say goodbye to what you're used to. When Jesus's friends start following him, it's like starting a new year at school. They're learning amazing new things from a new teacher and making new friends. They go on adventures in new places. They say goodbye to people they love. They're changing, and that causes division with their family or with their neighbors.

Check this out. This is my Bible I keep in my backpack. I write down these notes. These are times when my new friends in seminary school said something that changed the way I see Jesus. These notes are all times I've grown up in school - they're new things I learned that have made my heart bigger. I keep this in my backpack to help me through division and hard times - it helps me remember that Jesus loves me. Jesus wants me to grow into a better Ellie, bit by bit, day by day.

That means doing brave things. Like noticing when someone at school is being unkind. That means standing up for someone when they're being bullied, even if the bully is my friend. It even means listening when someone else is standing up to me because I've done something wrong. It means saying I'm sorry.

Growing, changing, loving our neighbors like Jesus - that's what we have to do, no matter what, even if it means division.

Because guess what?

God's love is bigger than our divisions. It's important to grow and change - just like it's important to go to school. And just like learning new things in school, following Jesus - loving God, loving your neighbor, helping your community - following Jesus means you'll change. And that's the most amazing, exciting thing in the world.

I pray that we're always changing, always growing our hearts to hold more love, and always praying for more bravery to stand up for what's right.

Amen!