

Archbishop Smith: Terms and Conditions

In our daily use of the Internet, it is not unusual to be presented with a click-to-agree contract that will govern the use of a product, service, app, etc. These online contracts, license agreements, terms of service, privacy policies and other agreements will present us with the option of indicating that, by clicking on “Join” or “I accept”, we are agreeing to all of the stipulated terms and conditions. Problem is, it seems that most users click and accept without having read that to which they have thus agreed.

This issue was raised two years ago in an online article of the Guardian (Mar 3, 2017). The author reported that a number of university students had “clicked to agree” to the terms and conditions of a social networking app called NameDrop. Apparently, according to a particular paragraph of the contract, they had thus agreed to surrender to NameDrop their future firstborn children!!! The article’s author was quick to point out that, of course, such an app did not exist; this was simply an experiment of some communications researchers to test the veracity of claims to have read that which was accepted.

Throughout the Gospels, we find Jesus spelling out very clearly the terms and conditions that we are to accept if we wish to be his followers. Yet, how familiar are we with them? Pope Francis is rather insistent that we each understand what it means to be a baptized follower of Jesus Christ. This means accepting, first of all, that Jesus sets the terms; we don’t. We cannot follow the Lord and participate in his Church on our own terms, only on his. But we need to take time to study, know and love what they are as we “click-to-accept” by the act of faith.

Some of those terms and conditions are on display in the Gospel passage proclaimed at mass on Sunday (cf. Luke 12:49-53). They set forth clearly what we can expect as we give our lives over to him.

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” Such a statement by Jesus catches our attention. We know that Jesus did, in fact, come to bring peace. The angels proclaimed peace at his birth, and he himself promised to give a peace – his own – that the world cannot give. So, where does this division come from? Well, we find out rather quickly as soon as we begin to follow the Lord without compromise.

Division begins, first, in our own hearts. There the fire of the Holy Spirit works to separate us from all attachments that keep us from giving ourselves completely to the Lord. Then, as we grow in fidelity and give authentic witness, we can easily find ourselves divided from those who have not accepted the Gospel. As Jesus himself points out in the same passage, this may even include members of our own families.

Such separations are painful, certainly. Yet, what leads to the peace Jesus

gives is accepting and adhering to the terms that he sets for us, regardless of the cost. Let's be sure to read the Word of God so that we know what they are.