

January 28, 2018 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

The pastor went up to an elderly woman and he said, “how is your soul?” and she said, “well pastor, the devil is really giving me a rough time.” Her husband, who heard this said, “hey, wait a minute, she’s not easy to live with either.”

In the first chapter of Mark’s gospel, already we are seeing a dramatic encounter between Christ and the devil. The devil makes his appearance through one of his slaves, a demon who has taken possession of a child of God. When Jesus, the savior of sinners and conqueror of evil approaches this possessed man, the demon cries out in panic and desperation, because he does not want to be sent back to hell. Demons don’t like hell either. It’s not a nice place and when a demon doesn’t want to go there, it tells you how much more we should not want to go there. He silences the demon and frees the possessed man. Demons, sometimes can be human; demons, sometimes can be fallen angels. There is a hierarchy of hell, just like there’s a hierarchy of heaven, among the angels. We know some of the names of the demons and angels because they are in the bible. Molech, Baal, Ashtaroth; all of these are names of demons. Throughout the ages, we have determined those. But you know today, people don’t want to talk about the devil. It’s interesting that Pope Francis, among the recent Popes, is the only one who’s mentioned him over and over and over again. Every time Pope Francis mentions the devil, the internet lights up. People get upset; people are joyous, “oh, he’s finally saying something about evil.” Other people are like, “aah, the devils nothing.” Well, that’s what the devil wants people to think. That’s one of his greatest tools, when people don’t believe in him. But, you cannot talk about Jesus and his ministry, without referring to the devil because He Himself, does exactly that. The Apostle John, in his first letter said, “the reason the Son of God appeared, was to destroy the works of the devil. The gospel writers distinguish between cases of physical illness and demonic possession; both of which Jesus cures. He refers to the devil in His parables and other teachings. The devil tempts Him in the desert and returns again later to engineer Judas’ betrayal.

The gospel teaches us an undeniable and uncomfortable lesson; the devil is real and he is interested in sabotaging the work of grace in our lives and in the world. He’s a fallen angel. We see this in the catechism of the Catholic Church which gets it from the Book of Revelation. One third of all angels refused to serve God because, when angels are created, they have knowledge of the future. They saw that they were going to have to bow down to a woman and then her son. God was going to lower Himself to become one of us. They couldn’t stomach the thought that they were going to have to answer to a human. So, they told God, “we will not serve.” War ensued, and Saint Michael kicked their rear ends out of heaven and God created hell for them. That’s how we know they’re real. Now, they try to convince us to rebel against God, too. And sometimes this can be a huge comfort, because it helps us make sense out of all the unpleasant influences at work, in and around us. Why is there evil in the world? We’re not crazy, we’re not failures, we are simply engaged in the greatest battle ever. A spiritual battle, for the salvation of our souls. That is why the Church consistently and tirelessly warns all of us against experimenting with the occult. They’re popular today, these practices, in our society and accepted. But of course, that doesn’t mean they are good. Society accepts fornication, adultery, euthanasia, abortion, suicide, and much much more. Horoscope watching, ouija boards, palm reading, tea leaf reading, crystals, etc. These seemingly innocent entertainments are hooks, the devil uses to draw us into his web of lies and deceit and false promises.

When I was in Austin, Texas, I was close to this Holy Cross brother. He had a PHD in theology and was teaching at a Catholic university there. One semester, he decided to teach demonology. Most people won't even attempt that because of what happens, and he found out. He had his students experiment with Ouija boards and all these other occult things, and bad things really really happened. So much so that he had to call in an exorcist to do the class and take care of them. It's real. These are gateways; gateways into deeper contact with evil spirits. Wicca, neopaganism, new age, white magic, black magic, and ultimately Satanism. When I go to one of the units in the prison complex, (we have three people in our parish that go do two communion services at two different units each week), I'll go with them to hear reconciliation and RCIA. Some of them are coming into the Church and I deliver the sacraments. It's interesting, that every time I go in and do a service, we walk out and there's this guy preaching about "the lord Satan" out in the courtyard. He is close to where we are at and he's trying to have Satan overcome us. Because it's a prison, I don't say anything because the guards will get me and not him. But, I want to tell him, "hey dude, we've got more power in that one little consecrated host than you've got all through hell," but I leave it alone. Some people think that Satan gives them power; he doesn't. They're not innocent pastimes; they contradict our friendship and relationship with Jesus because they look for fulfillment, meaning and purpose apart from Christ. Dabbling with them is consciously and foolishly putting our friendship with Christ at tremendous risk; the salvation of our souls.

There is a tribe hunters in India, that use a tactic to catch tigers. When tigers become man eaters, you have to kill them because they don't want to eat anything else, but us. We must be very very tasty. So, they have to catch the tiger. This is how they do it. They find the tigers tracks, and they track it back to the tree that it rests under, during the heat of the day. Then they go and get these large leaves from a specific tree; and then they go get these berries from another tree and they mix them up and create a sticky substance; and they smear it on top of the leaves and place the leaves on the ground, face up, for when the tiger comes back. The tiger comes back and he puts one paw on a leaf, and those here that have cats know what happens when something gets on their paw. They shake it to try and get it off. This doesn't work so the next thing they do is rub it on their face to try and get it off and the leaf sticks. Then they get really furious and upset and they start rolling. They roll in these leaves, the next thing you know they're blinded with leaves all over, and they're so caught up in getting these leaves off, the villagers can kill them. Dabbling in the occult is like putting a paw or a hand on one of these leaves.

There is a spiritual battle going on; has been since the beginning of humanity. Above the surface, everywhere, there's spirits everywhere. If we could see the battle going on, we would die of fright and shock. We cannot avoid being involved in this battle. The devil is just interested in making our lives miserable, now and forever, by separating us from God.

I was ordained about three years, and decided one day, "I think I'll read the horoscope, one time just to see what it's about." It said, "you're going to get married today." I've never read it again. Not only do I not want temptation from Satan but I don't want temptation the other way, looking around, who would I marry, who would I marry. Not going to happen. Satan does those kinds of things to separate us from God. Jesus was able to dispel this demon from this possessed man, very easily. He is also able to give us strength over the temptations that plague us.

There are four things that help the strength of Christ and the grace God, flow more freely in our lives. First: We stay close to Christ. It's because this man was close to Jesus, that He was able to expel the

demon. The same goes with us, if we stay close to Christ through the sacraments, especially the sacrament of confession and then communion.

Second: We stay close to the truth. The devils' main weapon is deception. "He doesn't exist, God would never send evil out." All these kinds of things. He manipulates our selfish tendencies by spreading lies and half-truths. And, we try and rationalize things. That's one reason he fights to keep us out of the confessional. Confession is the gift of truth. Exorcists have asked the demons, "where do the sins go when people are absolved in the sacrament of confession?" The demon says, "they disappear completely." Satan has no access to them and God doesn't. "So, you can't use them against a person?" "No, there is nothing to use against the person." So, we face the truth about ourselves; we are sinners. That's why Jesus came on this earth. Jesus came to save us. God loved us so much, that's what happened. When we deny we're sinners, we deny the mission of Jesus. Through God and through the priest and the sacrament of confession, we are reminded of God's truth, mercy, forgiveness, and unconditional goodness. People have the mistaken view of a negative idea of confession. "I don't want to go to confession." "I have to go to confession." "yada, yada yada." And yet, the confession is a blessing; the mercy of God. It brings light to our eyes, our lives, our souls. The great baseball player, Babe Ruth, was raised a Catholic and when he got into baseball and the money, the fame, and the women, he left the Church, for a while. He lived a very immoral, horrible life. When he was lying on his death bed, one of his friends came in and said, "don't you think it's time you put your house in order?" Babe knew exactly what he was talking about. They called a chaplain, he gave a full confession, and he was laying there, and he told his friend, "I feel so free now, I can't believe it." The sacrament of confession releases light, the light of Christ.

Third: We stay close to others in need. The devil is the lord of selfishness and Christ is the Lord of Love. When we resist our selfishness by serving others, doing charitable works, helping others who need it, we weaken the devils' influence in our lives.

Forth: Call upon your guardian angel every morning and every evening.

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love entrusts me here, ever this night (or ever this day), be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide.

Very powerful prayer. People think, "ah, I'm an adult now, I don't have to say this prayer." Guess what? Say it, it helps. We are all Christian warriors; we are all called to fight the spiritual battle; we are all called to recognize the truth. The truth that Jesus is the light of the world and he can rule over Satan, anytime. But, we have to let Him. So, when people deny the devil, and culture says this is okay, we as Catholic Christians have to say, "No, the devil is real, and I need Gods' help"

God bless you