

Homily
June 9, 2024
10th Sunday in Ordinary Time
22:22 – 38:02

Many of you know that I have a habit of spending time at the gym three times a week. For over 20 years, I've had a personal trainer who helps me to keep this aging body stronger and more active.

When I was in Terre Haute, one of the persons who was my trainer was a college student studying at ISU to be a trainer. And he was very good. At our second session however, he hurt me. He made me do things I did not want to do. And after a particular exercise, I looked at him and said, "You are the son of Beelzebul." (laughter)

He said, "What?!"

"All right, fine. You are the *spawn of Satan!*"

"What?"

He turned to another trainer, a Roman Catholic and said, "Do you know what he's talking about?"

He said, "No."

I said, "You're both liturgically and spiritually illiterate! *Beelzebul is Satan*. If you're the son of Satan, that's your dad. If you're the '*spawn of Satan*,' same thing!"

I turned to Latham, that was his name, and I said, "Latham, which do you want to be known as? Beelzebul's son, or the spawn of Satan?"

He said (hesitantly), "Spawn??"

To this day, in our relationship he is "Spawn." I won't tell you what he calls me. (laughter)

If you want to understand more about the Spawn of Satan, read C.S. Lewis's masterpiece, "The Screwtape Letters," written in the middle of the 20th Century. It's an exploration of the reality of evil through the devil. And it's still applicable to today, to our very lives. It's a marvelous, marvelous piece.

My brothers and sisters, I think you know this. As Roman Catholics, we believe that Satan is real. He's not a figment, or something made up to scare us. And since we are a Church that believes in *Lex Orandi / Lex Credendi*, that the law of prayer is the law of belief, then if we look at our own rituals, we know that we believe in this Satan.

Just go to the RCIA rituals, especially the Three Scrutinies, in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent. We pray over those who are to be Baptized, Confirmed and Receive Eucharist. And part of our prayer is a prayer of *exorcism* to push aside, through our prayer and hope, the effects that Satan can have on any of us, but especially those who are journeying towards becoming Christian.

If we attend an infant Baptism, we know that the sponsors and the parents are recalled to reject sin and Satan.

And we do know that the Church does perform exorcisms. Yes. Our diocese has an appointed exorcist who does a few exorcisms every year. Most of the calls he gets are not for exorcism. They're more for mental health, but he has to discern that.

So yes, we do believe in Satan. And we have reminders of the power to keep Satan at bay from our Baptism to the moment of our death. The Sign of the Cross, whether it's here (on our forehead) or on our entire body.

And we know that a Crucifix, a sacramental reminder that we have, hopefully, hanging in our homes, is a reflection of power over sin, death and the Devil, who by his slyness brought sin and death into the world.

Evil does exist. And to deny in the world that evil exists, is perhaps one of the greatest evils, as now deceased Archbishop Pilarczyk of Cincinnati once said, "To deny evil is possibly one of the greatest evils in the world."

How do we know that evil is real? Let's just look at Genesis, our First Reading and recall the entire section of Chapter 3. We get the latter part. Or at least the part where Satan is told what his future is going to be in the form of the serpent. But all of Chapter 3 – you know the story – Adam and Eve in the Garden, told to take care of things, enjoy it, stay away from that one tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And the serpent slithers its way into their midst and **tempts** them. First the woman and then the man, through the woman. (I'm not dissing women, okay? I'm just following the story line.)

And then we come to this part which we heard. Adam and Eve are approached by God in the Garden and He says, "Where are you?"

"We hid."

"Why?"

"Because we're naked."

"How do you know that? You've eaten of the tree. Haven't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"Why did you do this?"

The woman says, "The serpent made me do it." Do you remember Flip Wilson? "The Devil made me do it!" (Imitating Flip Wilson)

The man says, "She made me do it."

Do you notice something here? Neither one took responsibility for what they had done. They blamed it on somebody else, even though they were directly asked, "*What have **you** done?*" That's another of the reasons we know that evil exists in the world.

The serpent in the reading is directly addressed by God. Now the serpent image in Genesis is very powerful. Think about what serpents are. They are without legs and they do not eat like any other animal. And they are slithering about silently, never on a straight path. And they venomously inflict poison and pain. That's the first indication of evil.

The second in the reading is this: evil inclinations of human beings, which we see we have, are as destructive as the Holocaust or Rwanda or even Global Warming. Those are huge presences of evil in the world. But evil is not always catastrophic, is it? It can be very small, but it's there.

The third thing that we realize is that Adam and Eve were grasping at control. They had everything they needed. But the Devil invited them to grasp at control. And then they didn't take responsibility for what they had done.

In light of all this, lest we stay in such a negative place, let's consider **God**. In this very reading, the first sign of God's promise comes to us through the serpent's punishment. "He shall

strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.” Scholars call this the *Proto Evangel* – the hint of the Good News (Evangelium).

Even after this in Genesis, hope is not lost. Even after what we don’t hear, what happens to Adam and Eve in terms of what they’re going to go through now, and all of humanity, hope is not lost.

Which takes us to Mark’s Gospel account. This, how can I put it? This unwelcoming reception of Jesus, their own. Jesus as we heard is accused of being in league with the devil, being out of his mind and being crazy and evil. Even though from Chapter 1 of Mark’s account, verse 14, through to 3:19, what we have seen is Jesus’ goodness over evil.

Think about it. Well, just follow me for a moment. There’s first, John’s (the Baptist) arrest. Then Jesus moves on to the synagogue where he cures an unclean spirit on the Sabbath. He then goes to Simon’s mother-in-law’s house and cures her. He silences demons and continues to say, “I must go beyond home in my ministry.” He touches a leper because he’s overwhelmed by the needy. People open up a roof to lower a fellow down into the house and he says to this one, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then he is accused of blasphemy and he says, “Which is easier, to forgive sins or cure this man?” And so on the Sabbath he urges the man to stand up, “take up your mat and go home.” He calls Levi, tax collectors, sinners and disciples to gather at dinner. The disciples do not fast, as they walk through standing grain and they are accused of doing wrong. And he says, “*No. The Sabbath is made for man. Not man for the Sabbath.*” He cures again on the Sabbath. He cures people of unclean spirits on the lakeside. Then we get to our Gospel passage.

He gets home and what’s the greeting? “You’re crazy. You are in league with the devil.” Why would they say that? After all the good we have seen in 2 chapters? **They were afraid**. They were afraid and fear can change goodness into evil in the mind.

At that time, they lived under Roman occupation. They didn’t want unrest.

Jesus’ actions were challenging religious customs because of how it was enforced and poorly taught the values underneath the Law.

“He touched lepers! He can make us all unclean! He consorts with sinners and tax collectors and outcasts of society and religion.”

His family is afraid. His village is afraid. Religious leaders are afraid. And they turn the eye of evil upon goodness.

What they missed, my brothers and sisters, is the hope of healing he brought. He gathered outcasts. He chose from those who were present. He didn't send out a headhunter to find the best and the brightest.

And then he showed them the way, patiently. And was accused of doing evil.

Yes, my brothers and sisters, the devil does exist. We believe that. Evil is in the world. Beyond our imagining and in the very small things that we ourselves do.

But never forget. Never forget hope in Christ Jesus. As we have heard in the gathering song. As we have heard in the 2nd Reading. As we hear again and again when we gather here. When we celebrate the Eucharist. Hope in Christ Jesus overcomes sin and death and all that makes life hard. Because hope in Christ Jesus leads to eternal joy.