

III LENT 2018

SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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"The devil made me do it"...was a saying used by Geraldine Jones, the fictional character and most famous recurring persona of the late comedian, Flip Wilson, during his early 1970s TV show. The saying has since become a popular catchphrase for bad behavior.

The first time the phrase was used was in the Garden of Eden. "The serpent deceived me and I ate", says Eve. "Sorry, that's not an excuse", says God, "and by the way, Adam, you're not off the hook either".

Satan can't make us do anything. We can't blame him for the bad choices we make...any more than Eve could have. We have free will; we can't blame the Devil for our own sinful choices. Eve didn't get a "get out of jail free" card...we don't get one either.

The Devil certainly can influence us in the choices we make. We have the option to do what's right or what's wrong. While we are responsible for the choices we make...the Devil can never have complete control over our lives. The Holy Spirit will not allow that to happen.

What about demonic possession? Demonic possession does exist. But, there is a difference between being enticed by Satan and caving in and being possessed by him. Demonic possession is the condition where Satan or his legion of devils have complete control over a person...forcing him or her to act in destructive and harmful ways.

The Gospels for last Sunday and today both deal with demonic possession. Last week a distraught mother begs Jesus to heal her daughter, who "has a demon and is in a terrible way". We don't know anything more about the girl's condition...only that she was miserable.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is confronted by a man who has a devil that keeps him from speaking. We also don't know anything more about the man. Jesus heals him by "casting out the devil"...and the man spoke clearly. Jesus saw the man was truly possessed by a devil and healed him; he performed an exorcism.

Some people accuse Jesus of casting out the devil through the Chief Devil, Beelzebub. "Beelzebub" is a Hebrew title and means "Lord of the Flies"...another name for Satan. Jesus responds to the accusation by saying the idea Satan would work against himself was ridiculous.

Anyone who has seen the movie *The Exorcist* will agree it's a disturbing movie...all the more so because it's based on a real-life event. But Satan usually doesn't have to go to the extremes we see in the movie to get our attention and distract us...demonic possession is a last resort for him.

Saint Paul calls us children of the Light. The Light of the World is Jesus. Dark behavior...the kind Satan likes...is not what we as Christians are about. We want to be seen for who we really are...children who are in a loving relationship with God our Father and with each other...and that means we must act accordingly.

Paul tells us to stay away from behavior that hurts us and those around us...and to come back to Jesus who will help us walk as children of the Light. We will get tested...we sometimes get distracted...but we can learn not to listen to the Devil...we can turn back...we can learn not to behave foolishly.

We can never say, "the Devil made me do it". If we find he is enticing us...what we say should say is this..."From all evil and mischief; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil...Good Lord deliver us". And he will!

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