

III LENT 2020

SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

EPHESIANS 5.1-14 St. LUKE 11.14-28



First impressions...are the events when we first encounter other people. We form mental images of the people we meet. We ask ourselves, "What's are these people about"? They are asking the same question about us, "What are we about? The first impressions they give to us and we give to them, greatly influence how we view and treat each other in many contexts in everyday life.

We might say today's Gospel is about *first impressions*. Jesus heals a man who couldn't speak. Most people believed the man who couldn't speak was being punished by God for some terrible sin he had committed. Some people in the crowd accused Jesus of getting his power to heal the man from Beelzebub...the Lord of the Flies...another name for Satan.

Jesus knew what they were thinking so he tells a short story...a country that divides itself into groups that fight each other will not last very long...a family whose members fight each other will fall apart. Satan thrives on seeing people suffer...he takes pleasure in our pain. He would not want to see people healed. Jesus has the power to heal and his power comes from God.

We have in the short story Jesus tells about the Return of the Evil Spirit the perfect Lenten Parable. Lent is about cleaning our minds, bodies and souls of the dust and debris the clogs our spiritual lives. In the short story, an evil spirit is driven out of a person and wanders around the country looking for someone else to infect. The evil spirit ends up going back to the person it was just driven out of...and takes seven of its demon pals even worse than itself...so the person is in even worse shape.

The point of the story about the Return of the Evil Spirit is getting rid of the dust and debris out of our spiritual lives...getting rid of the bad things that are holding us back...isn't enough. The bad things we get rid of have to be replaced by good things...otherwise we leave ourselves open to attack. Whatever spiritual discipline we take on during Lent should focus on replacing the bad with the good.

If the Gospel is about *first impressions*...Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is about *lasting impressions*...making this the perfect Lenten Epistle. Ephesus was a large city in Asia Minor, present-day Turkey. It was a city where there were many different religions and cultures.

Paul talks about things that are seen and not seen. He calls us "dear children" who should always act in a way that is best for others. The way we act toward others is called LOVE. He warns us to be on our guard against people who try to deceive us with foolish words.

Some people do things they shouldn't at night because they think they won't be seen and won't get caught. Some people commit crimes at night because they think they can get away with their bad behavior. But, they will usually get caught and their bad behavior will be made public for everyone to see. That will certainly make a lasting impression they tried to avoid.

Saint Paul calls us "children of light". Jesus is called the "Light of the World" and he is the one we want to follow. We shouldn't get involved in saying or doing things that are hurtful to others. In plain speak...we shouldn't say or do anything we wouldn't want to see on the front page of the Chronicle...or on the evening news...or on the Internet.

First impressions are important...*lasting impressions* are just as important. We serve God and mankind and want to be seen for who we really are...freed from walking in darkness and free to live in the Light of Christ.

If we always try to do the right thing...if we always try to act for the good of others just as Jesus did for the man he healed in the Gospel ...then we are following Jesus who is the Light of the World.

Let's walk as Children of Light...and make a *lasting impression* on everyone we meet.

