

III Lent 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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*Ephesians 5.1-14 St. Luke 11.14-28*

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First impressions...are the way we size people up when we first meet them. We form opinions about others...based on the way they look, talk, walk or where they were born. We try to figure them out. At the same time...they are trying to figure us out based on their first impressions of us. First impressions are important but they can lead us into making quick and inaccurate conclusions about others. Sometimes those conclusions hurt others.

Today's Gospel is certainly about first impressions...and wrong conclusions. Jesus heals a man who was possessed by a demon that kept him from speaking. The religious authorities believed God was punishing the man for some terrible sin he or one of his ancestors had committed. In John's Gospel...Jesus says this is the wrong conclusion.

After Jesus heals the man and he is able to speak again...some people accused him of healing the man by the power of the chief demon, *Beelzebub*...whose name means *Lord of the Flies*. Flies like to hang around dead things. Satan stands for darkness and death. Jesus has God's power to heal...Jesus stands for light and life.

Jesus then gives his famous speech about a country divided against itself not lasting very long...and a family divided against itself falling apart. The point Jesus is making is Satan loves to see people suffer. He would not want to heal the man who couldn't speak. He would not work against himself.

Jesus then tells two short stories that are intended to reinforce the idea we need to keep our defenses up against Satan. The weapons we have on our side are the power of the Holy Spirit and persistent prayer. We leave ourselves vulnerable when we think we have our spiritual house in order and then do nothing to keep it in order. We have to replace the bad things we just got rid of with good things that build up our spiritual lives.

Then a woman in the crowd tells Jesus his mother must be very happy to have given birth to and nursed such a wonderful son. Jesus replies real happiness comes from hearing and keeping God's word.

Today's Epistle is also about first impressions. Paul calls us "God's dear children"...whose lives must be controlled by love...the same love Christ has for us. Ephesus was a seaport with many competing religions. It was the center of the Diana fertility cult. Paul tells us since we are God's children...we should not become involved in sexual immorality or indecency...and we should not use language that is profane or vulgar. We should be satisfied with the gifts God has given us and not be greedy for things we don't have.

People often commit crimes at night because they think they won't get caught. Technology has made it more difficult for people who use the cover of darkness to do things they shouldn't be doing. When their actions are brought into the light...they are shown for what they really are. Paul cautions us not to become involved in activities we want to keep hidden. We want to be transparent in the work we do and bring glory to God and his Church.

Saint Paul calls Christians "children of light" who follow Jesus...who is the "Light of the World". Our lives are already open books to God...we should conduct ourselves as if they were open books to everyone. We shouldn't get involved in saying or doing things that are hurtful to others...and we shouldn't judge others solely on first impressions. We shouldn't say or do anything we wouldn't want to see in the newspaper, on the Evening News or the Internet.

We do want to make good first impressions on the people we meet. We may not have the opportunity to fix a bad first impression. Our job is to try to learn what is pleasing to God. We want to walk and be seen as Children of the Light...not in a smug or self-righteous way...but with love and truth and goodness.

The question we must ask ourselves as we leave here today...what kind of lasting impression do we want to make?

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