

III Lent 2022

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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Ephesians 5.1-14 St. Luke 11.14-28

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Demonic possession is not something we like to think about much less talk about. Modern humanism tends to dismiss demonic possession as fantasy and the Devil as nothing more than a figure in a fairy tale.

Belief in demonic possession was universal in the ancient world. Jews and pagans both had forms of exorcism to cast out demons. In the early Church this week marked the beginning of the formal testing of candidates for Baptism at Easter. The first session included exorcisms of the candidates.

The *Book of Common Prayer* retains a Rite of Exorcism in the Baptismal Office...

...First, when the priest speaks to the godparents or sponsors for the Child, or directly to the adult candidate..."Do you renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?"

...Second, in the Prayer said by the Priest afterward, making the sign of the Cross on the Child's or Person's forehead, that..."they will never be ashamed to confess their faith in Christ, and fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; continuing as Christ's faithful soldiers until their life's end."

Most of the world's religions understand the concepts of lightness and darkness as having something to do with good and evil. Some of these religions teach it's humankind's job to try to maintain a balance between good and evil...which they see as opposite but equal forces.

The Gospel makes it very clear there is no such thing as a balance between good and evil. Jesus didn't come to level the playing field between God and the Devil. He came to teach, to heal, to suffer, and ultimately to die...for us...and for once and for all time to defeat the Devil and expose him for the liar he is...and the deceptive games he likes to play on the world.

God and Satan are not equals or opposites. Satan, like all of the angels, was created by God to serve him and be his messenger. His other name...Lucifer...means "one who brings light". Angels, like human beings, were created with free will. Satan used his free will to work against

God...he chose to be a messenger of lies, trickery and deception. He chose darkness over light.

In the Gospel, Jesus heals a man who had a demon that kept him from speaking. The man was able to talk clearly. Some people in the crowd accused Jesus of being an agent for Beelzebub...the Chief Devil...***the Lord of the Flies***...that Jesus got his power from him. Jesus told the crowd that argument was ridiculous. The Devil wouldn't fight against himself...he's out to hurt people, not help them. Jesus told the crowd because he drove out demons by God's power, God's Kingdom had already arrived.

The Devil also knows God's Kingdom has already come to us and he wants no part of it. He knows he has a short time before Jesus returns, so he wants to do everything he can to disrupt our lives and make them complicated and messy. He is the liar, the accuser and the deceiver, who knows he can never have the upper hand. He wants us to walk in darkness and not in the Light that is Christ.

In the Epistle, Saint Paul tells us to live like people who belong to the Light that is Christ. We must love others just as Jesus loved and died for us. And we are to avoid doing things in the darkness thinking we won't get caught...a lie the Devil wants us to think is true. And Paul tells us not to swear or use bad language...uh oh! The Devil's biggest lie is he wants to keep us from being honest with God and ourselves.

The Last Gospel, the first fourteen verses from Saint John's Gospel is read at the conclusion of every Mass. It tells us Jesus is the Word who is the source of life, and this life brings light to mankind. Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never put the light out. Jesus has made certain, once and for all time, darkness has been cancelled out by light...death has been replaced by life everlasting.

We are people of the Light that is Jesus. Jesus always acts in our best interests. He wants what is best for us. When we follow Jesus and apply Paul's teachings to our lives, we will see our work produce a rich harvest of every kind of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Jesus is the Light of the World...our Lenten message to the world...we don't have to stay in darkness...Christ gives us light!

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