

III Lent 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

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

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Welcome to the 1970s. Situation comedies reflect the changing attitudes of many Americans. Gone are the days of “Leave it to Beaver” and “Father Knows Best”.

Flip Wilson became the first African-American to have his own TV show. Wilson’s alter ego, Geraldine, was a sharp-tongued Southern woman who was prone to impulsive buying. Her excuse: “The devil made me do it.”

It was a funny show, but here’s something to think about. The Devil cannot force us to do anything against our will. We can cave in to the temptation...but we can never say, “The Devil made us do it.”

And then there’s Maude. Bea Arthur, in her TV persona of Maude Findlay, has a lot to say...about everything. Maude and her husband get into frequent arguments. She always tries to have the last word. Her favorite catchphrase, “God will get you for that, Walter!”

Another funny show, but here’s something else to think about. God is never out to get us. No matter how far off course or messed up we think our lives are...God is out to rescue us! That is what Lent teaches us.

Both today’s Epistle and Gospel readings tell us how to arm ourselves against Satan and his tricks...so we don’t give in to the temptations that lead us away from God and into dark places.

Saint Paul is a man who never minces words. In his Letter to the Ephesians...he tells us to live like people who belong to the Light that is Christ. People do evil things at night because they think they won’t get caught. That’s the Devil’s greatest lie. The Devil wants to keep us from being honest with God and ourselves. We can’t hide things from God. Paul writes...

*...And when all things are brought out to the light, then their true nature is clearly revealed.*

Our true nature is to love others just as Jesus loved and died for us. Our actions must be motivated by love coming from our hearts. God’s Holy Spirit leads us into doing good things. We want to be known for what we are...Children of the Light of Christ.

Jesus is always true to himself. He’s made of the same stuff the Father and the Holy Spirit are made of...God! He cannot be dishonest with himself. When Jesus heals the man who was possessed by a demon that kept him from speaking...some people in the crowd accused him of being an agent for Beelzebub...the “Lord of the Flies”...that it was Satan who gave Jesus the power to heal.

Jesus responds the charge is ridiculous...Satan wouldn’t fight against himself...he doesn’t want to see people healed. Jesus tells the crowd God’s Kingdom is already here...and it’s by His power he drives out demons. Satan knows this...he knows his time is short...he is going to do everything he can to convince us his lies are true.

The Gospel makes it very clear there is no such thing as a balance between good and evil. Jesus and Satan are not opposites trying to balance the power between good and evil. Jesus came to teach, to heal, to suffer, and ultimately to die...for us...and for once and for all time to defeat and expose Satan for the liar he is...and the deceptive games he likes to play on the world.

That doesn’t mean we can let our guard down. In the Gospel...Jesus tells a short story about an evil spirit gone out of a man. The evil spirit travels all over the country looking for a new host. When he can’t find one...he goes back to the very same man he just left...and brings seven even more evil spirits with him. Now the poor man is in worse shape than ever.

Jesus is saying at the point we think we’ve gotten rid of the major messes in our lives and we think we have it made...we believe we love God and are in love and charity with our neighbors...we think we have a spiritually clean house (ourselves)...it is at that moment we are the most vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. We have to replace the evil gone from our lives with what is good and productive.

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, truth and overflowing love.

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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