

**FROM THE PASTOR**  
**MARCH 3, 2024**  
**THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

**THE REALITY OF THE DEVIL**

In this Holy Season of Lent we enter into a spiritual combat. We seek to overcome our own tendency to selfishness, sensuality, lust, gluttony, pride, envy, sloth, pride, anger, covetousness, and our own desire for comfort. The Gospel of the very first Sunday in Lent records Our Lord's fast of forty days and his own combat with the devil.

That the devil exists is a revealed truth of our Holy Faith. Sacred Scripture speaks of the devil from the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) to the very last book of the Bible (Revelation or the Apocalypse). In the parable of the weeds and the wheat Our Lord speaks of the weeds being sown by *the enemy*. *An enemy has done this*. In the parable of the sower Our Lord says, *the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown*.

Some people are inclined toward a superficial optimism and think that evil is merely an incidental imperfection in a world which is continually evolving toward better days. Nevertheless, the history of mankind has been adversely affected by the devil's influence. We find in our day an intense evil that cannot be explained in terms of human behavior alone. One need only think of the horror of the shooting in Parkland, Florida, and the many other shootings, and random acts of terrible violence that have become in many ways, "the new normal." The devil, in all sorts of ways, wreaks havoc on mankind. There is no doubt that the whole of man's history has been the story of our combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so Our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history up to the last day. The devil does this in such a way that he provokes incalculable harm of a spiritual nature and, indirectly of a physical nature, to individuals and to society.

The devil's activity is mysterious but at the same time real and effectual. From the first centuries, Christians were convinced of diabolical activity. St. Peter admonished the first Christians: *Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him firm in your faith.* (I Peter 5:8).

With Jesus Christ, the devil's dominion has been reduced, for he has freed us from the power of Satan. As a result of the redeeming work of Christ, the devil can cause real harm to those who freely allow him to do so, by freely consenting to and separating themselves from God.

The devil (in traditional Catholic practice the prince of darkness never deserves a capital letter) is a personal, real and individual being, of a spiritual and indivisible nature, who separated himself from God forever by his sin, because the devil and the other demons were created naturally good by God; but they became bad of themselves.

He is a liar and the father of lies, of sin, of discord, of affliction, of hatred, of all that is absurd and evil on earth. He is the astute and envious serpent who brings death to the world, the enemy who sows evil in man's heart and the only being we have to fear if we are not close to God. His sole purpose in the world, which he has never renounced, is our perdition. Every day he will try to achieve that purpose through all the means at his disposal.

In his temptations the devil has recourse to deceit, because he can only present a false good and fictional happiness, which inevitably turn into loneliness and bitterness.

One of the great characters in western culture and literature is Dr. Faustus. This legendary character entered into a pact with the devil to find true love and happiness but, in the end, met only darkness, death and tragedy. The devil cannot give what he does not have. The devil cannot give joy or happiness because he is misery and hatred.

The Faust legend has appeared in much of western culture. The most famous account is that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe's novels are particularly morose and have had ill effects upon society, like his famous novel *Werther*. That single novel caused many in the German speaking lands (especially Vienna) to take their own lives. May you pardon the personal reference, but the only literary work of Goethe that I have enjoyed was his *Italian Journey*. Particularly memorable was his description of being driven in a carriage by a young man from Naples. As they climbed the volcanic pathways of Mount Vesuvius the youth looked back toward Naples and wept. When Goethe asked him why he was weeping, the boy responded *Questo è il mio paese!* (I often read this passage and found great consolation in it during the three years I lived and studied in Italy). But Gounod's famous novel of Faust was made into an opera with the music scored by Gounod, a true masterpiece. But I digress.

It should give us great confidence to know that Our Lord has left us many means by which to conquer and to live in this world with the peace and joy of a good Christian. Amongst these means are prayer, mortification, the frequent reception of Holy Communion and the sacrament of penance, and love for Our Lady. We are always safe when we are in Our Lady's company and held fast in her loving arms.

The use of holy water is also an effective means of protection against the devil's influence. The great saint and doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila teaches us, *From nothing do evil spirits flee more precipitately, never to return, than from holy water*. Dear parishioners, take holy water to your homes. There sprinkle it about liberally. Sprinkle the dear little ones with it.

A sure sign of the presence of the devil is the critical spirit. In fact, in Gounod's opera the devil identifies himself as *that one who says "No."* The critical spirit especially directed to the Church and to the priests is a sure sign of the presence of disorder in the soul. I know many fine physicians, many of whom I myself have been a patient. Many of these good physicians need only look upon an individual and know what the illness is. So it is with an experienced priest.

For sin and evil have a physical manifestation. An experienced priest can look upon an individual, and in the hardness and coarseness of his/her features can see pride and lack of penance, neglected confession, and the presence of the devil. In fact in Gounod's Faust, when the devil is asked to identify himself, he responds with the chilling retort, *I am that one who says NO.*

And so my dear parishioners, please use the means to conquer the evil one. Abandon bitterness, outrage, and upset. How often do we not hear of someone who is "upset." This is usually never done in concern for others. It is usually because of a perceived slight to oneself. It is wounded pride. Let your soul be softened by the gentle effect of grace which causes joy in the supernatural order. In the natural order it frees one from hardness of heart and features, causes joy, and even smiles and laughter. As Pope Francis has said, *There are no sad saints.*

In closing this meditation may I leave you with a Lenten thought. Remembering grievances works great damage. It is accompanied by anger, fosters sin, and brings hatred for justice. It is a rusty arrow spreading poison in the soul...Be lovers of peace, the most precious treasure that anyone can desire.

*A Blessed Lent!*  
*Buona Quaresima!*

In Jesus and Mary,  
***Monsignor James F. Pereda***