

The Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The War We Must Wage

Today's first reading presents the events immediately following Adam and Eve's sin. Remember now God wasn't concerned about fruit. He was concerned that Adam and Eve not experience evil. But He gave them free will so they could choose. How else could they love? All love is a choice. You husbands and wives know this very well. You have to choose to love each other every day. The deep sadness is that Adam and Eve used their free will to choose themselves instead of choosing God. They chose selfishness and disobedience. Their pride led them to choose evil. They believed the serpent who told them that if they disobeyed God and ate from the tree they would be like gods themselves.

The scene we have today begins with God finding Adam hiding, embarrassed because he was naked. His experience of evil had left him self-conscious and vulnerable. Then the blame game begins. Adam blames Eve for his state. She blames the serpent. This is so typical of evil. The person who does evil is always looking to implicate other people rather than accept his responsibility for the evil deed. In the Catholic Church we teach our children to take responsibility for their misdeeds as soon as they are able to distinguish right from wrong. That is why we have First Penance at 7 years old. By doing this we are teaching our children to fight against evil.

Back to the Garden of Eden. As a result of Adam and Eve's actions, sin and death came into the world. The first battle of the war against evil was won by the devil. But God would achieve the final victory for mankind. He tells the devil about another woman, a new Eve, who would have a Son that would smash the serpent's head. Enmity, war would be waged between the serpent's followers and the women's son and His followers.

Jesus speaks about this war in today's Gospel. He is accused of using the power of the devil, Beelzebul, the Lord of the Flies, to perform his healing. This is the blasphemy that can't be forgiven: believing that Jesus does not have the power of God, but the power of the devil. Then in the passage referring to Jesus' physical family, Jesus proclaims that those who perform the will of God have an intimate relationship with Him. They are the opposite of Adam and Eve. For the followers of Jesus the relationship with God is more important than anything the world or the devil could offer.

Jesus came to wage war against evil. His followers are to join Him in this battle for the Kingdom. That is what we are called to do. Religion is not just a matter of going to Church on Sundays. Religion is about war, the war against evil. "Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the world. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," the Lord says in Matthew 10:34.

And so we must engage the enemy. He is fighting us by promoting hate. We have to counter with love. Neo-Nazis, Klu Klux Klanners, and other White Supremacists, have gotten it into their feeble minds that they are the true Americans,

and the rest of us are a blight to the country as well as the whole human race. We cannot just stand by and witness their hatred. We have to stand up for those they are attacking, be they people of color, non Christians, or the stranger/immigrant among us. War needs to be waged, and we need to wage it. We cannot turn away when we witness the haters spewing their evil. We have to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was also the son of Mary, a Semitic Jew.

The enemy is fighting us by promoting crass selfishness. The concept that anyone could live for something greater than themselves is foreign to the serpent's minions. By declaring that "All that matters is taking care of number one, myself," the devil condemns those who believe this lie to a life where nothing matters. We wage war on this concept by living for eternal values. We put the needs of others before our own wants, and, sometimes, even before our own needs. We trust in God to take care of us while we take care of those who reach out to us.

Recently the cause for canonization of the martyrs of La Florida has been introduced by our own bishop, Bishop Gregory Parkes. It is clear that these people, mostly Native Americans, chose to give witness to Christ and accept death, so that those who came after them could look at their witness and embrace the Catholic Church. All the martyrs of all ages did exactly that. They challenged evil to do its worst to them because there was something and Someone infinitely greater than themselves. They placed our need, our need for witnesses to Christ, before their own needs.

The enemy is fighting us by using God's gifts against us. All that God has made is good, but good things can be used for evil purposes. Whenever we take a stand for morality, we are taking a stand against the perversion of good by evil. When we decide not to go to that party where we know that social drinking will quickly descend to drunkenness and to using drugs, we are taking a stand against evil. When we fight for the moral use of God's gift of sexuality, we are putting up a fight for that which is holy and good and against that which is perverted and evil.

The old catechism used the term *Church Militant*. Those who were confirmed were told that they were soldiers for Christ. Perhaps some misunderstood this concept to refer to battles against other people. Our war is not a war against other people. Our war is against evil, against the serpent and against all who fight for the devil.

Be sure of this: there is a war which is being waged. And we, as followers of Christ, have no choice but to be involved. There will be skirmishes in every one of our lives. There will be times that we might think we are losing. We are not losing. The outcome of the war is certain: in time, in God's time, the Son of God will crush the head of the serpent.