

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jul 11th 2015**

Today's gospel is a wonderful exhortation by Christ for the Church and for each of us when we face the enormity and complexity of the forces of evil in our lives and our world. I don't know about you, but as I learn more about these forces, the more I'm tempted to think they are too big for us. It seems we do not know how to cope with them, we cannot deal with them on our own, and we cannot stop them let alone destroy them!

Here's a list of evidence illustrating the work perpetrated by the forces of evil and their effect on our lives and our world:

The human neglect and exploitation of the earth's ecology.

The outbursts of racism like the recent slaughter, here in the U.S., in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The pollution of hearts and minds by peddlers of internet pornography and the image industry's unceasing visualization and even glorification of violence.

The modern form of slavery we call human trafficking, with its illegal smuggling and trading of people for forced labor or sexual exploitation.

The neglect by commercial businesses of their responsibility to work for economic justice and equality and to avoid corruption.

The deep enmity between the perpetrators of war and their adversaries, while the victims of war are left to suffer and die.

Global terrorism.

Overcoming any one of the items in this partial list of evils appears overwhelming. Taken together, they seem impossible to cope with, stop, and destroy.

The items can be classified under one or more of the three roots of evil identified by St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises. He calls them the "Standards of Satan" which characterize the troops of his army: greed, self-centered ambition, and arrogant pride. Ignatius presents them alongside three counteracting Christian virtues: spiritual poverty, a readiness to suffer insults and humiliation for the sake of God's Kingdom, and humility. He describes these as "Standards of Christ" – or characteristics of those who follow Him.

Christ's exhortation in Mark's Gospel today is addressed to His followers — a kind of “call to arms” for combat against Satan's troops and the forces of evil:

Do not be afraid of this battle. I am with you. I will protect you. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. Think of the shield of Faith and the defeat of death from the Cross. Think spiritual poverty.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Satan's army can kill the body. Think of our Martyrs from the early Church to the present. Think of Christ confronting the clique of Pharisees who insulted Him, humiliated Him, and had Him put to an ignominious death.

What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim from the house-tops. Think of Christ shining into the darkness with you, in you and through you—publicly revealing truth and justice and showing the forces of evil for what they are.

Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. Think of the Lord's inevitable destruction of the forces of evil, to be seen when time gives way to eternity and Christ ascended returns to bring God's Kingdom to its fullness.

The bottom line for of today's gospel message is this. You are worth more than whole flocks of sparrows; the Father knows and cares about you in every detail of your life, even as you face the temptations and dangers which may surround you. You can expect attacks at all levels – from what St. Ignatius calls "the enemy," Satan, or the forces of evil. But you should know that the one you are serving is stronger than the strongest opponent you will ever meet. Follow me, and I will enrich you with a poverty of spirit, steel you in the face of insult and humiliation, and ground you in my own humility as you pursue God's will to deal with what the world thinks is impossible to achieve.

Remember, nothing is impossible for God, and God assures you of success. You are God's vanguard. You are God's sons and daughters.

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