

My friends in Christ, all of our Scripture passages today for Mass speak to us a great deal of the reality of evil. The Book of Wisdom, first of all, offers us a crucial insight into the mindset and behaviors of the wicked (those who knowingly, willingly participate in evil); the wicked scheme and plot against the innocent: “Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us.... [And] let us condemn him to a shameful death.” Death? So, because they have arbitrarily deemed the just one to be “obnoxious,” he deserves to die? Yet thus is the irrational and disgusting nature of evil.

But maybe what is *most* irrational and *most* disgusting about evil is that we who sin – we who are sinners...we actually *choose* to do this! Son of Sam was totally *wrong!* The devil does *not* make us do this; we *choose* to do this! Yes, the devil may tempt us and tease our passions and lie to us as well as mix lies with truth so as to confuse us...but in the end, we *choose* – *we* do. And *this* is what we are given to learn from Saint James today. From where do conflicts amongst us come? This is what he asks us. Why do we covet? Why do we kill and envy? Or fight and wage war? “Is it not from your *passions?*” Saint James asks us. Yes, the devil might lure our passions and lead them astray – but it is *us* who *choose* to follow; it is *us* who choose to succumb to temptation, to our passions.... And what results are these things here that Saint James lists and laments: killing and envy and so on.

And then in our Gospel text today from Saint Mark, Jesus is *the* Just One. The prophecy in the Book of Wisdom is fulfilled in the Passion of the Christ. And so horrifying and powerful is the irrational and disgusting nature of evil that even the Son of God was made victim. No matter how small the sin, how seemingly insignificant that instance of evil...it was horrifying enough, powerful enough, to make God suffer. One little sin of ours – no matter how small we might *think* it is, and no matter how private – is one more lashing the Lord was made to suffer on the pillar of His awful scourging. One little sin of ours is one more thorn in His crown. Thus is how horrifying and how powerful and how pervasive sin and evil truly are.

All sin *starts* personal and private: a mere bad habit here; a little harmless vice there; and we excuse it and dismiss it as such. Until that bad habit and “harmless” vice becomes addiction – *then*,

we have a personal and private *crisis*. And that is only where all of those *personal* and *private* sins are concerned.

But then, there are the sins and the abundance of evil that are *not* personal and private; they are *societal*; they are *systematic*; they become *normalized* and no longer strike us as wicked and obscene for the horror that they truly are but in fact are *tolerated* – even *celebrated*. I am thinking in particular of what we the Church have been made to suffer in the last few months with regard to the societal sins of some certain priests and bishops who have made it normal, who even *celebrate*, to make sick sport of our children and youth, and some certain *other* bishops who have tolerated this for far too long. By now, hopefully you have seen the statements put out there by our Bishop, Thomas Daly; he is absolutely correct to address this issue, this scandal, both in terms of the sinful actions of the clergy who have done this or have allowed it to be done and in terms of the reality of the demonic that saturates this whole thing like a noxious fume. The famous exorcist Father Gary Thomas has also spoken of the diabolical element that is clearly at work. The devil is having a field day with all of this. But I have heard some criticism that by his speaking *anything* at *all* of the demonic in all of this, Bishop Daly is in fact dismissing the awful sins of the sinners with some weird claim that the devil made them do it. False. As I say, the devil might tempt us, tease our passions, lie to us, mix lies with truth so as to confuse us...but he *does* not and *cannot* *make* us do *anything*. In the end, we *choose* – *we*.

To shed light on the ugly reality of evil – this is not to dismiss the crimes done by the guilty, nor is it to disregard the violence done against the victim. No disrespect is intended here; the guilty *are* guilty, and they *will* face the consequence either in *this* life or in the hereafter; and the victims *are* victims, to be vindicated and healed if not in *this* life, then God-willing in the hereafter.

So now what? We are told in Sacred Scripture of the awful reality of evil. We are reminded by our Bishop that the demonic element in all of this has been *quite* at work and that all who will be found guilty *are* guilty and *need* to be punished because they have chosen to succumb to temptations

and the devil's lure.... So *now* what? What does all of this mean for *us* here at Saint Peter? Or what does it mean for *me*...or for *you*...for *each* of us – at home, at work, at school? We are left, perhaps, to wonder: what now, what do we do, what *can* we do?

We might begin, first of all, simply by acknowledging that in some measure, to some degree, we are hurt, and we need to be healed. We have victims of all kinds of physical, emotional, spiritual violence present here right now in this church. And, God willing, victims of violence are even now on the path toward healing. And if they are not, then God willing, they would somehow reach out, and we ourselves would find a way to find them so that, together, we would find and take that path toward healing.

We can *also* strive to strengthen (and *keep* strong) our congregation – our family in faith here at Saint Peter. We have our many ministries and guilds that contribute to the overall mission of our parish, of course. But I am thinking in particular of the *little* things, the one-on-one encounters that we can have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Are we greeting folks at the front doors, in the narthex, as they come to the church for Mass? And not just folks whom we may already know, but the complete stranger as well? Are we checking in on folks, calling them at home, *maybe* even going to their home to visit, when we notice that they had missed Mass on Sunday? Who knows, but that perhaps they are sick or got hurt somehow. And are we letting the *priest* know whenever a member of the family or a friend is sick or hurt, so that the priest can pray for them – and, if needed, he can administer the Anointing of the Sick? When I was up in Chewelah, despite Chewelah being a small town – where *everybody* knows *everybody* – it bothered me to no end that I was often the *last* one ever to find out that so-and-so had a stroke, or a heart attack, or was diagnosed with cancer, or was in a car accident. And then my parishioners who *finally* would inform me of so-and-so's tragedy would actually have the gall to ask me *why* I had not paid a visit and administered the Anointing. Because nobody even *told* me that so-and-so was hurt, hello! I am only a *priest*, not some magician who can just pull information right out of the air whenever I want – I am *not* Google!

So yes, that right there is a *very* good thing we can do: keep your priests informed whenever somebody needs prayers and healing.

And something else that we can do in all of this for our own healing and also for the healing of others: go to confession. Who knows the pain that our own sins might have done to others and what harm others have been made to suffer because of us? And so it is that we need healing in that regard, to be healed of our own brokenness, to be absolved of our sins. And the Lord is right there in the chapel of mercy – waiting for us to receive the grace of His love and mercy and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We need to go to confession.

But through it all, in *whatever* we can and will do in our ongoing fight against evil and in our ongoing pursuit of healing and strength...in *all* of this, there *must* be prayer. Because prayer truly is our main link with God. Prayer is communication with God, talking to (and *listening* to) God. And if prayer (and, therefore, if God) are not part of the picture, not part of the solution...then we have to ask ourselves: what would be the point of even trying?

Jesus Himself tells us that there are some demons that can only be driven out by prayer and fasting – fasting, of course, being a very physical form of prayer and penance. Because this is so as Jesus tells us, Bishop Daly is calling for a diocesan-wide day of prayer and fasting for the healing of the Church and all of her faithful, a day to take place on Saturday, September 29<sup>th</sup> (the Feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael). May it be that *all* of the holy angels and saints of God would come to our aid, for our healing and strength in this time of crisis and scandal, and that our ongoing fight against evil and sin would bring victory to us and greater glory to God; and may the Lord Himself, our most powerful defender and the utter fullness of our strength, and Who offers Himself to us in the Eucharist as blessed Food for our pilgrim's journey, continue to call all of us, here and everywhere, to Himself...so that He Who is the Good Shepherd can lead us all home at the end of days to the Paradise of Heaven, a place of refreshment...light...and peace.