

I think it is fairly safe to say that we can agree that there is evil in the world. It is not at all difficult to point out the more obvious examples from recent history.

- The holocaust of six million Jews in World War II
- The death of 740,000 in the killing fields of Cambodia
- The staggering numbers of innocents slaughtered in the Rwandan genocide
- The ethnic cleansings in Bosnia
- The large-scale killing and persecution of Christians in Africa and now, more and more, in the Middle East
- 54 million babies killed in the United States alone since the legalization of abortion in 1973
- And, of course, our own experiences of the events of 9/11.

These are large and, almost, gratuitous examples of the evil we know. They make it nearly impossible to deny the evil influence that leads to such extreme acts of death and violence.

However, there are some people that are comfortable in reducing them to:

- atrocities of war,
- politics,
- over-zealous religion expression,
- and the “Right to Choose”.

But to discount the influence of evil in our lives would be a grave mistake. These examples show us that to trivialize the influence of Satan, either directly or indirectly in the world can have deadly consequences.

(PAUSE)

There are certain paradoxes in our faith concerning evil and its effects.

1. Our world is filled with much evil, but the world is NOT evil. The world is good. God created it and pronounced it good.
2. Each one of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We are all

inherently good! God created humanity and pronounced it VERY good. We are made for virtue, yet we are often controlled by vice.

Gossip, racism, lying, pornography, and adultery any one of those and thousands of others.... compete for our attention, and we, either happily or reluctantly very often give in to the temptations.

Sin is destructive, first of all to ourselves, but also to those around us. Families are divided, relationships are severed, marriages are broken, hearts and minds become cold.

Sin is not only destructive; sin is accumulative, like snow, building up in layers. We all know that the longer it snows the harder it is to shovel a path to take us out of it.

When we steal a candy bar, or cheat on a test or lie on our taxes, and we don't immediately get caught or zapped with lightning, we tell ourselves that it was no big deal. If we have enough consecutive incidences that are contrary to our good conscience, and they all turn out to be "no big deal" we stop even bothering to consult our natural values of good.

That doesn't mean we are bad people, it means we do some bad things. Things that become a habit, perhaps even.... an addiction.

We buy into the lie that what we do, just doesn't matter, it is just between me and myself. It's not hurting anyone else.

On a larger scale, that is how the Khmer Rouge could slaughter 700,000 innocents, how a Nazi soldier could march thousands into the gas chamber and sleep at night and this is how a Catholic politician can promote the cause of abortion and still place the Eucharist into their mouths.

They lie to themselves; they say they are just doing their job. It's not sin, it's just politics. They lie and become numb to the fact that they are lying. They even begin to believe the lie themselves.

Sin has a way of making us numb as well. When sin wins, especially when it wins over and over and over..... no matter how big or small the sin, we run the risk of being enslaved by it. If we are enslaved we are not free. We have become sin's possession. We are possessed by evil.

But today's Gospel tells us that we do not have to remain in the grip of evil.

These lines of scripture show the purpose of the Gospel reading: **Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!"** and **The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him.**

Two things are observed here: First, evil, that is the sin in our lives, when threatened, will convulse. It will put up a fight. It will make an effort to keep us its slave.

The second and more importantly, Jesus.... the sovereign God of the Kingdom that He announced last week.... "rebukes" the evil.

Now, we think of this word "rebuke" differently than the scripture authors. To us, a rebuke is a chewing out, a verbal assault for a wrong.

- But God.... God rebuked the forces of chaos and the world was created.
- God awoke in the boat with His disciples, rebuked the storm and all calmed the wind and the water.
- At the Red Sea, God rebuked the waters and they separated so that His people could leave the slavery of Egypt and enter into freedom.
- And to show his resolve to keep His people free, He rebuked the waters again and they swallowed up the enemy.

When God rebukes, it is a big deal. He is showing His supreme authority over sin and nature and His authority over the nature of sin.

Jesus has won... by His life, death and resurrection... Jesus has won freedom from sin for all who call upon Him.

- No sin is too small; no sin is too great for Him to forgive.
- **None.**
- infidelity,

- pornography,
- theft,
- lying,
- abortion,
- none is beyond His love and forgiveness. None is beyond His mercy.

Jesus desires to rebuke, to take out of us the evil that we cannot master, and especially the evil that is mastering us.

We are made for virtue.

What is standing in our way?

- Do I think my sin is unforgivable? It is not.
- Do I think it is something the priest has never heard before? Believe me, it is not. There hasn't been an original sin since..... well original sin!

For me, and probably for a lot of us, it is a mixture of shame and pride because almost every time I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is as if I am reading from a far too familiar script. It's the same sins I confessed last time and the time before. Remember, I said that sin will fight to stay alive in us.

But, to tell my sins to my confessor is to whisper them into the ear of Jesus. And in the words of absolution, I am set free. And each time, I get stronger and more able to resist my same old temptations. I am both set free and set moving toward true freedom.

What is it for you? What gets in the way of your allowing Jesus to free you?

I think most of us can figure it out in only a few moments reflection. But are we willing to pray our way past it and seek forgiveness, to seek freedom?

Jesus wants to rebuke our bad habits, our addictions, and our sins. He is waiting; He has already defeated all evil.

Will we let Him conquer it in ourselves as well?

Only you know the answer to that question.

