

Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,

As we begin Lent, we are reminded that we are in a spiritual battle. We see the spiritual battle dramatically portrayed on this First Sunday of Lent 2022 as we hear about the devil tempting Jesus. He faces Satan head-on. When we hear how Jesus demolishes the devil's sophistries, we might think, "Sounds pretty easy." Well, I would like to issue a warning, "Do not try this at home." Do not talk to the devil.

Although Jesus speaks directly to the devil, we should not do the same. In case you have not noticed, there is a difference between Jesus and us. He is God; we are not. He is all powerful and all-wise. We are weak.

Let me offer a comparison. To take on the devil directly would be like us taking on a kick boxer. Even the most poorly trained kick boxer could have many of us on the floor in a matter of seconds. Just so, a minor demon could bring us down - if we try to deal with him on our own.

The devil is like a wolf pursuing a sheep or a lamb. You would think the quickest way to bring down a sheep would be to attack its legs and make it stumble. But reportedly that is not the wolf's normal method. He goes for the neck. And when he sinks his teeth into the neck, a lamb cannot bleat. It cannot call for the shepherd. The devil does something similar. He wants to first disable our voice so that we do not call out to the Lord.

Have you ever noticed that when you try to set aside a time to pray, that something inevitably comes up? All of a sudden, you remember a chore or a person you should talk to. Or better yet, you want to take a quick look at the TV or the Internet. Maybe you begin thinking about what you have in the refrigerator. The devil will do almost anything to keep you from praying. Many families tell me about the trials they go through on Sunday morning, getting ready for Mass. Do you think that these things are just a coincidence? No, the devil attacks at the throat, wants to take away your voice - so that you will not call out to the Lord.

Sometimes people ask why God allows the demons to attack us so much. I do not know, but I can at least make a guess. I think God does it for the same reason he permits anything bad to happen. He has in mind a greater good - namely, that we will turn to him. Sometimes a person has to hit bottom before he recognizes he cannot do it on his own.

There is something else. Whenever we give in to a temptation, it takes power from us. But the opposite also applies: when we resist a temptation, we take power from it. The devil wants to rob us of power, to make us impotent. The Lord wants to make us strong by resisting temptation. The more strength, the more power we have, the more we have to offer to God through Jesus - and the better we can serve others.

I have talked quite a bit about the devil, more than I like to. I want to conclude by stressing that we do not have to fear the devil. St. Augustine said that since coming of Christ, the devil is a chained power. He compares the devil to a dog tied to a post. For him to attack, we have to step into his territory.

Stay away from certain temptations. Various studies have shown that sexual involvement of any kind, apart from marriage, can harm a person, especially a teenager. One University of California study concluded that "early sexual activity - whether in or out of a romantic relationship - does far more harm than good." You know, nothing magic happens when a person turns 20. These studies also apply to older people. Stay away from certain temptations. Flee them. Run to the one who overcame the enemy.

And, above all, remember that, by his death and resurrection, Jesus has shackled the demonic powers. When tempted, do not talk to the devil; turn to Jesus. As the Lord says to us in today's Psalm: *Because he clings to me, I will deliver him...He shall call upon me - and I will answer him.*

Have a Blessed First Sunday of Lent 2022!

Rev. Rafal Ligenza

Pastor — St. Joseph Parish

