

Where is the devil? Take just a moment and look around you. Do you see him? Is he lurking behind you, or maybe sitting just a few seats away? Is he holding your hand, or maybe whispering in your ear?

DEVIL, WHERE ARE YOU? SHOW YOURSELF!

You've heard me say before that I watch too much television, WAY too much. I'm a product of the "Sock-it-to-me" generation when comedy was starting to push the envelope from being humorous to being vulgar and obnoxious. But even in the late 60's and early 70's there was still an understanding, even if presented in only a comedic way, that the **devil** was **real**, as we'd hear Flip Wilson tell us "The devil made me do it." And this is what prompted me to ask the question, "Where is the devil?"

It appears that in today's society the devil is looked upon as one of those ancient, medieval superstitions, carried forth over the millennia, especially by the Catholic Church, as the source of all that is wrong in our lives. Today, the thought is that the devil isn't REALLY real, and, unfortunately, neither is God, because if the devil doesn't exist, then neither does God, and so in that vein SIN doesn't exist and I don't have to seek reconciliation.

"If I do something to you that you don't like, I'm sorry if I hurt your *feelings*, but I have a life to live too. Stuff happens." And we shrug it off. But WHY did I hurt someone's feelings in the FIRST place? Today's generation will tell you Sierra Hotel, there's nothing divine or insidious about our actions, nothing for me to be too concerned about. And that SOUL thing: science hasn't located it in our bodies, so it's not real either.

NEWS FLASH for our newest millennials and those of us who are buying into today's latest social propaganda – God is NOT dead, the devil IS REAL and is seeking out your unwitting soul, and humankind is NOT like the rest of the animals that live by INSTINCT, we live by FREE WILL with the power and ability to CHOOSE right from wrong, to choose to follow God's will or the cunning will of the devil.

In today's gospel Jesus rebukes the devil not so much to heal the man possessed by the unclean spirit, the devil, but to SILENCE the devil – "Quiet! Come out of him!" QUIET! Jesus gives the SAME command to those he cures, and even to his **own** disciples, to NOT tell others about Him. He wants folks to hear the words of their heavenly Father for themselves, and to come to BELIEVE, to have FAITH, on their own CHOOSING, of their own free will, not on the spouting of the devil who KNOWS who Jesus is, "the Holy One of God", or of others who are coming to believe for themselves.

In the first reading God promises to raise prophets out of the kinsmen of the Israelites, those whom God will speak thru to His people, and His people will heed their teachings. Yet throughout the Old Testament we see that the prophets were not always heard – the people listened, acted righteously for a while, and again turned their backs to God. Even Jesus, thought to be a prophet by some, fell out a favor with those who heard him, even though when he spoke, he spoke with AUTHORITY, as though he himself were the AUTHOR of his words – from GOD's mouth to YOUR ears.

Yet even today we tend to look for God by looking over our shoulder, like a child walking farther and farther away from their parent, seeking their OWN path, distancing himself from the love and protection he KNOWS is still there. Our conscience, rightly developed in the beginning **by** love and **for** love, always seek the good for oneself and of the other. Yet we ALL still struggle with demons - mental, physical, and spiritual - demons tugging or pushing or just straight out tempting us toward 'a better life', 'an easy way out', 'an experience where there is no harm-no foul'. It's just about what's best for ME. Or IS IT?

The devil **IS** real, of that we must always be aware. With that awareness we can confront him and defeat him, with the help of an ever-loving Father, and a brother who showed us the way to fight this battle, Jesus. We are strengthened to carry on this battle thru the sacraments: by receiving the Eucharist, Jesus himself, real food for the journey, real strength for the battle; by going to Confession, **converting** our hearts of stone to hearts that love and conform to the will of God; and by prayer, reminding ourselves that we **are** weak and **need** help, that we can't fight the devil by ourselves.

"What is this? A new teaching with authority." From me, maybe not. Just some thoughts from one who struggles just like everyone else, who has looked into the eyes of the devil, and doesn't like what he's seen. Let us raise each other up in prayer.

Deacon Pat