

I'm going to make a statement that is going to cause some of you to have your heads spin around on your shoulders at least 3 times just like that scene in the movie "the Exorcist". Are you ready?

Politically, just politically, Jesus Christ was the Donald Trump of his time. He came out of nowhere and attracted a large group of followers. He didn't worry or care about fitting into the existing power structure. He didn't use the normal methods of the day to disseminate what he had to say; he went directly to the people. He knew that he would upset those in power and was just fine with that; he looked forward to the inevitable confrontations. As for those in power, to counter his influence they made false accusations and spread lies in order to try to discredit him. They attempted to entrap him and eventually decided to kill him.

Now I'm not trying to paint our President as the moral example of the age, we all know that he is not; but as I read today's reading and throughout the Gospels, I have to admit that the similarities in the political climate are striking.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus has returned home. Home in this case was not in Nazareth; it was most likely in Capernaum, the town that he used as his base for his travels throughout Judea. His family from Nazareth and the Scribes from Jerusalem came to confront him. The family came out of love because they had heard the distorted tales; the Scribes were angry and they came out of fear.

Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil, all different names for the same evil, and his minions, aka the demons, then and now do their best to tempt, possess and to lead people into sin and eventual damnation. The way the Scribes and most of the people of that time dealt with the possessed was to shun them and ostracize them from society. Instead of confronting the evil in society; which lead to the possession, they made socially acceptable

accommodations for the evil, and ostracized the people possessed by the demons in order to avoid ritual impurity.

Jesus on the other hand directly confronted the evil and drove it out of the person. Then he welcomed them back into the community and reunited them with their families. By showing love and compassion, by emphasizing obedience motivated by love instead of obedience motivated by rules or fear. Because of this he gathered great crowds of people around him and was perceived as a threat to the existing power structure.

We all want to be accepted. We want to be liked, even admired by our families, friends, and society at large. In this quest for social acceptance it is so easy to lose our way. So much of what Saint John Paul II described as the culture of death has been forced by the courts into the mainstream of society and is considered to be normal, valid and even good practices. Many of these behaviors are part of a cruel, and incredibly damaging farce on our children and unfortunately they are actively supported and encouraged by adults, including teachers and parents, because they are accepted by society as 'normal'.

But we know these behaviors and practices by the teachings of our faith to be unmitigated evil. To oppose these practices, particularly in public is to open one's self up to immediate wrath and castigation. Our families and friends will advise us, sometimes quite forcibly to keep our mouths shut. Strangers will shout names and insults; racist, and homophobe are probably the first out of the door and many more will follow, simply because we express the teachings of Our Lord and Savior and the Church with love.

Too often we try to make excuses for the people who are steeped in the evil of the culture of death. We pretend that God makes mistakes when he makes people, we blame bad behavior on past trauma, bad parenting, video games. We credit anything for someone's bad behavior, including our own bad behavior on just

about anything except their, or our own poor decisions. If you were paying attention to the Old Testament reading from Genesis today, you would realize that the blame game has been around for a long time. God didn't buy into it back then, he isn't going to buy into it now.

What are we to do? First and foremost we must become and remain firmly grounded in our faith with prayer, fasting, alms giving and regular reception of the sacraments. We can't lose sight of the fact that we belong to One Holy and Apostolic Church. That means that we live and pass our faith on to others, in our families, at school, in dorms and barracks, at work, in nursing homes and even in public. The great commission given to the Church by Jesus Christ calls all of us to; "Go forth and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the of Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19)

There is that sticky widget; that end phrase, 'to obey all I have commanded you.' We would really like to avoid that whole obey thing, but we can't. For our young graduates the pressures in college to abandon their faith for a whole host of excuses is going to be constant and significant. For those heading into the military or the workplace the form of the temptations will be a little different and remaining true to their faith, to who they are, isn't going to be any easier.

To acquiesce to social pressure, to hide or abandon our faith because we are afraid to be identified as practicing Catholics because someone may not like us just shows that we don't trust Jesus to have our backs. What a terrible thing to do! We are his brothers and sisters! In failing to trust Jesus we are rejecting the grace provided by the Holy Spirit in that moment. Pile enough of those moments up and we can end up abandoning our faith though benign neglect.

In this Gospel, Jesus tells us of the one sin that cannot be forgiven, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. (Mk 3:29) Our catechism explains it this way: “There is no limit to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and final loss.” (CCC1864) In other words, when we sin, when we reject the graces of the Holy Spirit, if we abandon our faith, and if we fail to seek reconciliation, then we are in the process of packing our unhappy selves up for a one-way trip to hell.

Adam and Eve hid their nakedness in the Garden of Eden. Most of us leap to the conclusion that they were hiding because they were ashamed of their sexuality, but there is another, more accurate interpretation for their action. They realized that their souls were naked before God and they were ashamed of their behavior. We need to remember that just like Adam and Eve, our souls are naked before God. He sees and knows the good we have done, and he knows our sins. We have the great gift of the sacrament of Reconciliation; we need to make use of it.

The world outside these walls is beautiful, and full of opportunity and adventure. It is full of wonderful people, deserving of our respect and our love. There are also too many people who are willing to crush our spirit for their own selfish purposes. We must never lose sight of the fact that we are children of God and the way we maintain our family relationship with him is by obeying him.

When we do what he has commanded us to do, when we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will always know his love. How can any level of social popularity and acceptance measure up to the joy of knowing God’s love? It can’t.

Let’s go forth, with trust in God, happy to live as he commands and eager for the promptings of the Holy Spirit.