

Where is the devil? Look around, do you see him? You know, the tall fire-red guy with horns and pointy ears, and the long tail? One of those angels who was cast out of heaven because he thought he should be equal to God. Look around. He's near to us, near enough to touch our hearts, minds, and souls. We may not see him directly, but we can certainly see a lot of his influence in the world, and in OUR lives.

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 pushing the envelope from humor 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 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's 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 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 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! The same reason Jesus doesn't want those he cures, or even his **own** disciples, to tell others about Him. He wants folks to hear the words of their heavenly Father for themselves, to come to BELIEVE, to have FAITH of 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 starting to believe for themselves. There will come soon enough a time when many will be brought to faith THRU the faith of others.

In the first reading God promises to raise prophets out of the kinsmen of the Israelites, those thru whom God will speak to His people, and His people will heed their teachings. Yet throughout the Old Testament we see that the prophets were not always listened to – the people heard what they had to say, 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 lips, 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, will 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, Jesus, who showed us the way to fight this battle. We are strengthened to carry on this battle thru the sacraments: by receiving the Eucharist, the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus himself, real food for the journey; 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 make the time to raise each other up in prayer.

Let us also remember to pray for young men, and even those older men with some worldly experience, who are starting to hear a calling from God to be of service to His flock thru the sacrament of Holy Orders. Place your signature in the Traveling Vocation Crucifix book for a particular week of your choosing, to take the crucifix into your home to pray for vocations to the priesthood and diaconate. The months of March, April, May, and beyond are pretty wide open, awaiting **your** response to God's calling you to prayer. Pray that more men will HEED the call to offer their lives in service to the Church. This opportunity to pray is for ALL of us. Let **US** pray, and then let God do the rest. God bless.