

HOMILY – 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT – 18 FEBRUARY 2018

“God Does Not Want Our Death But Our Life”. These are the words of Dietrick Bonhoeffer, famous German theologian, on the subject of ‘Good and Evil’.

In today’s Gospel from Mark, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert. What does this mean? It means that Jesus, God made flesh, left the sanctuary, the safe place of home in Nazareth, to go into the desert/wilderness. To place the personification of goodness in an isolated place where his humanity is weakened by fasting and aloneness, to place the ‘Lamb of God’ as St John the Baptist calls him, in the path of wild animals, hunger and thirst, seemingly without any protection. However, the greater danger He faces is not lions or snakes or poisoned water but the Devil, the personification of evil. The great deception of mankind and I mean, the great illusion, is that evil does not exist. And, very importantly, that I am safe. I will never come to any harm. The truth is, whenever there is a real presence of goodness, kindness, justice and truth, there, right there, the power of evil will seek to bring it down.

The coming of Christ is the clear evidence of this reality. From the moment of his birth, Herod, the King of the Judah, seeks to destroy Him. Then the Pharisees and Scribes, the High Priests, the Sanhedrin. In fact, when Jesus confronts evil in the man possessed, Legion cries in possession, “Have you come to destroy us”. Evil is the great masquerade, it dresses itself up as lambs, when in truth, they are preying wolves, as Jesus warns us. Even His Apostles are vulnerable, hence to Simon Peter, “Get behind me Satan”!

In the rite of Baptism for infants, the child is anointed with the oil of Catechumen, to set them free from original sin. What is Original Sin? It is that from the origin of humanity, people have had the potential to be overcome by evil intentions. The disordered and irrational mindset of an evil person is to destroy, damage, vandalise and even kill those who stand for goodness, kindness, beauty and truth.

But, the moral issue we must keep clear in our minds, is that the moral battle has been won by Christ. He has shown, by his mighty arm and outstretched hand, His cross and passion, that the power of God is greater than the power of evil. The critical issue for all of us is to recognise when we are losing the war against evil because we are ignoring Christ and drifting into giving into temptation. Becoming a pale reflection of what we can be. Hence the Lord’s Prayer, composed by Christ Jesus himself, says, ‘Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, Amen’.

Today, I am convinced, that the Church is really under attack, like it never has been for many years. The disordered and deceitful ways of society are really determined to bring down the Universal Church. Seeking to divide the Vatican, alienate Bishops, distort the minds of clergy and confuse the People of God. We must really be strong in faith and truth, in keeping to our apostolic mission, not to abandon our Catholic identity.

As St Paul says, to the People of Corinth, there can never be harmony between God and Satan. We fight with weapons of justice, to attack as well as defend.

So, as we enter these forty days in the wilderness with Christ, determined to be faithful to all the Lenten promises we have made, let us never underestimate the moral challenges of our times. The sanctity of the Mass, the sanctity of the unborn, the welfare of the dying, the institution of marriage, the role of the Papal authority and infallibility, the integrity of Priesthood, the integrity of charitable giving, the protection of the innocent, do not allow your faith to be corrupted.

In all these moral crusades and more, Christ is there at the helm, urging us on in our defense of Faith, Hope and Charity. Let us all start with our own conscience and remember that Jesus died on a cross for sinners, to lead us, as Peter tells us, To Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, in union with God.

God Bless you all.