

## Homily – June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Satan, or whatever you consider the demonic to be, gets significant air time in today's first reading and in the gospel. Satan, or the devil, is known by many evil traits, but the two most prominent are "liar" and "accuser."

Contrast that with the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth (not lies) and who is your Advocate, your defense lawyer (not your accuser). To the degree we have allowed ourselves to be loved by the Truth, then we find Jesus as the Truth (the Way, and the Life). To the degree that we have allowed ourselves to be loved with lies we have to scramble to hide behind a made-up persona; we have to scramble to hide, as Adam and Eve did, behind our own fig leaves. The temptation is to keep looking good without actually working on being good.

For many of us, if we were honest, peoples' opinions about us and how people react to us, carry much more weight than we would want to admit. The late Brennan Manning says it well when he wrote in one of his books: "God can read our inmost thoughts," and he continues, "Here is the essence of perfect sincerity in conduct—to care for nothing but God's judgment on our actions, not to vary our attitude to suit the company you're in, not to hold one opinion when alone and adopt another in conversation, but to speak and act as in the sight of God who can read our inmost thoughts." To live that way takes a lot of honesty.

Like I said, Satan—shown to be a snake in the first reading from Genesis—is a liar and accuser. When Adam and Eve listen to Satan rather than to God, they become liars and accusers themselves. When confronted with their disobedience to God, Adam immediately blamed Eve, Eve blamed the snake, and the poor snake didn't have a leg to stand on! When we don't build our lives on Truth, which can only come from God, we become desperate for other peoples' attention, affection and affirmation. Here's a story about how that works.

***It's a story about Monk Makarios the Great of Egypt. A young man approached Makarios with the desire to become holy (and he only had a weekend to do it). Makarios told the young man that if he wants to become holy, he should go to the cemetery and rail against the dead with every insult he could throw at them. So off went the young man and he did just that. He went to the cemetery and told the dead how useless they were, how insignificant were their lives, and how easily they are forgotten by the living. When he was done insulting the dead, the young man returns to the monk. Makarios, the monk, asked him how he made out. The young man responded that his insults were met only with silence. The monk suggested the young man return to the cemetery but, this time, he was to heap praise and compliments upon the dead. The young man returns to the cemetery speaking to the dead in such terms: "You are the most wonderful people ever to have lived. You are missed by everyone who knew you. You were the most generous, forgiving, and wonderful people in all the world." When he was done, he reported back to Makarios that the results were the same---more silence from the dead. Makarios then told the young man that if he wanted to become a holy man, he must become like the dead taking no notice of peoples' insults nor of peoples' praises.***

To say that others' opinions and reactions to us don't matter does not mean that others do not matter. It's only to say that we have an immovable center of great value that no one can supplant with insults or enhance with flattery. It's just there. It's given by God. It's God's opinion of us, and, at the end of the day, is the only opinion that matters.

There is a story about Jesus asking his disciples about how he himself was regarded by others. He asked, ***"Who do people say that I am?"*** And then he asked his disciples for their opinion by saying, ***"And who do you say that I am?"*** There is nothing wrong with Jesus, or any of us, asking this from time to time, so long as we don't construct our entire identity around those opinions.

This leads me to a word that has fallen out of fashion, mostly because we put a negative spin on it in the culture we live it; it's the word "obey." The word obey is not as constrictive or negative as you might think. In the Biblical sense, it has nothing to do with blind obedience which turns leaders into dictators. The Latin root of the word obey is "audire" (from which we hear the word auditory). So, to obey is to listen deeply. It's not a superficial listening but a deep listening.

Secondly, obey means being faithful to what we heard. I've just described prayer, have I not? Isn't that what prayer is supposed to be—a deep listening to God and getting in touch with God's will for our lives, then asking for the courage to live that will of God's? Or, as Jesus just told us, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." What is assumed by Jesus is that we first listen to God, we first commit ourselves to obeying God, then we do God's will.

Jesus was 100% committed to God's will even to the point of death. Had he been just a little less committed to God's will, God's opinion, he never would have given

his life for us; he would have died at 96 years of age in a seniors' home playing "Rummoli". Adam and Eve were tempted and succumbed to the temptation of letting someone else define their lives and dictate how they should act. Jesus himself was being forced to listen to his family and stay in the house because they themselves half believed what the crowd believed--that ***"He has gone out of his mind."***

Jesus knew the truth, that truth that can only come from God, that he was God's beloved. He was not in cahoots with Satan as he was accused of. Jesus knew this was a lie concocted by religious leaders who, they themselves, were hiding behind their own fig leaves and living dishonest lives.

Jesus didn't care that he was misunderstood or that lies were concocted against him. He cared only about God's will. He died indirectly—and maybe directly—not because of crucifixion but because of obedience, obedience to God's will. He stayed the course and paid the price.

Back in 1997, a few weeks before I was ordained, a friend who could not be at my ordination gave me a gift in advance. She told me up front that it was a re-gift. It wasn't originally intended for me, but since she could not give it to another young man who was supposed to be ordained, she held on to it and was going to give it to me instead. I was grateful but wasn't too sure about this idea of receiving something re-gifted. Then she told me the story behind the gift. Between 1979 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1992, El Salvador was embroiled in civil war. It was also the height of the Cold War between the United States and the U.S.S.R. The problems for El Salvador started almost 100 years prior. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, coffee accounted for 95% of the country's income, but only 2% of El

Salvador's population, the powerful land-owning elites benefitted. 75% of El Salvador's population then and now live in poverty. This all came to a head in the years between 1979 and 1992 when the government of El Salvador, with the political, financial, and military backing of the U.S., killed at least 75,000 of its own citizens while 8,000 disappeared and were never heard from again. Only with the killing of American Jesuit priests and Maryknoll nuns, by the Salvadorian government, did the U.S. rethink its role. Like in every war, the civilians pay the biggest price. A young man, whose name I don't even know, just weeks away from his own ordination spoke truth to power. He spoke up for the peasants and against injustice. He paid the price by being murdered, so he never got his ordination gift. Years later, saved for a special occasion, I got it. It's this stole, this plate, and this cup. Although it's a re-gift, I'm proud to have these.

Like Jesus, this young man was fixed on doing God's will. He blotted out the naysayers, the liars, and accusers. He, instead, listened to the voice of truth, the Spirit. When God called to him in the garden, he didn't hide behind some fig leaves but instead said, "Here I am; I've come to do your will. And like Jesus, he was killed because of it. I look forward to meeting him some day and giving the stole, the plate, and the cup back to its rightful owner.

***"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."***

*~Fr. Phil*