

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

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Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

New Haven, CT

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When we stop to think about it, Satan's temptations usually involve two things:

First, we are tempted to barter our calling to share eternal life and joy for the allure of some short-term and illusory advantage – be it money, possessions, pleasures, or power. Typically, we tell ourselves that God's judgment lies far in the future, and that the promise of eternal life also lies far in the future... But *here and now*, at this very moment, in ways both tangible and illicit, I can enjoy myself, I can enrich myself, and I can impose myself on others. For good measure, Satan sometimes whispers in our ears that God really doesn't mind if we take a few short-term gains. And, in the end, he says, we can presume that, since God loves us, he doesn't really pay attention to our sins, even those we don't repent of. So that's the first thing Satan promotes: shortsightedness and presumption.

Second, Satan's temptations almost always involve inflated self-esteem coupled with concern for one's reputation and popularity. Such a strategy is often effective in a secular culture that sometimes regards people of faith as irrational and pressures believers to conform to its ways. It's not easy to be the only parents who tell the coach that on Sundays their children will attend Mass instead of football practice. It's not easy to be only scientist in a lab who believes in God, or the only doctor in a practice who will not perform unethical procedures. So, the devil quietly advises us to think about our reputation and livelihood. "God wouldn't want you to be embarrassed," he sagely advises us.

Well, both of Satan's characteristic ploys are on display in today's Scripture readings – the desire for immediate gratification and the desire to be well-thought of. The Book of Genesis takes us to the dawn of human history, when our first parents succumbed to Satan's temptation to trade in their friendship with God, their happiness, indeed their original dignity, for the promise of a God-like knowledge and power in the here and now. Once they acceded to Satan's temptation to self-glory, they were at enmity with God and one another.

In the Gospel, we first meet the extended family of Jesus and then, toward the end of the reading, his Mother Mary and his immediate family. In Jesus' day, families were close knit and discipline was firm. A family member who caused embarrassment was quickly reined in. So when Jesus went off to preach the Gospel, got a reputation for working miracles, and, in the process, antagonized the authorities, his family very was concerned. They were embarrassed to think that one of their own had taken leave of his senses. Why was Jesus out preaching about some far-off "kingdom", when he should have been at home plying his trade as carpenter? At this early stage in Jesus' ministry, *even* Mary, the Woman of Faith, was concerned. *Even* the sinless Mary, utterly devoted to God's will, had to learn detachment; in stages she learnt to surrender her Son to a larger purpose and a greater family.

Sandwiched in between the two appearances of Jesus' family are the Scribes who also took umbrage at Jesus' miracles, especially his exorcisms by which he freed those possessed by demons. In a bid to hold on their power and reputation, the Scribes had launched a whispering campaign against Jesus. They sought to undermine him by claiming that he cast out devils "by Beelzebub" that is to say, "by the prince of demons"

And so, to sum up: In Adam and Eve, in Jesus' family (except for Mary) and in the Scribes, we see traits of Satan's handiwork: The desire for immediate gain and the desire to hold on to one's reputation *wins out* over the marvelous work that God in his mercy wants to accomplish in human hearts. This is how Satan often "gums up the works" in individual souls, in our families, in parishes and dioceses, and, if we let him, even in our own beloved Order.

Now, if we would thwart the devil's handiwork in our hearts and in our Church, then

let us learn from Jesus' confrontation with the Scribes in today's Gospel. Behind Jesus' back, as we saw, the Scribes had conducted a whispering campaign meant to undermine Jesus' reputation as one having power over demonic forces. The Lord not only exposes the error of their thinking *and* the evil in their hearts, but he *also* explains his exorcisms with a surprising turn of phrase: "No one," he says, "can enter a strong man's house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man" – Here Jesus describes himself as a burglar and what could that mean?

When Satan gains some foothold in our hearts, when there are sectors of our lives still in the thrall of Satan, Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeks to stage an invasion into Satan's domain, so as to overpower him and to plunder what Satan had come to regard as his own. This is what Jesus did for the people of his day who were possessed by the devil; and this is what he wants to do in any area of our lives in need of redemption. Anything and everything can be forgiven and healed in any of us and at any time, except, of course, in those who harden their hearts and close the door to the Holy Spirit's work of mercy, forgiveness, and conversion. This is what it means to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

So let us say we've come to a point of conversion and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we invite the Lord to come to us anew to take back from the powers of evil some unruly aspect of our lives...what then? In today's reading from II Corinthians, St. Paul lays out for us a three-stage process for *reversing* the encroachments of evil and for building toward an absolute future of friendship with God:

First, the Word of God must be proclaimed and heard in a spirit of faith: "I believed," Paul said, "therefore I spoke" knowing that God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us up. St. Paul challenges us to be a community that embraces with faith and thanksgiving God's overflowing mercy and goodness, his power to save us. When we embrace the faith *fraternally*, when we are *united* in *charity*, we find the courage not to be intimidated or embarrassed about living our faith, even when we're going against the flow.

Stage two is to acquire in light of God's Word and in the power of his grace, a fresh perspective on our lives, if you will, "a fresh, spiritual way of thinking". Often, in the midst of our troubles and sufferings, Satan finds his opening and, under the guise of

a coping mechanism, takes charge of some facet of our lives. His grip is loosened, however, when we follow the lead of St. Paul who teaches us that our afflictions, no matter how heavy, are in fact light in comparison to that glory beyond compare that God has in store for us. Actually, our temporary afflictions prepare us to experience the fullness of God's glory as they deepen our capacity for love, compassion, and self-sacrifice.

Stage three is to focus *not* on what is *seen* but on what is *unseen*. With the eyes of faith and hope, we are able to look beyond the false and fleeting advantages that sin seems to offer, and instead to begin living, even now, by God's grace that permanent destiny of glory and joy that awaits us in the resurrection of the dead, when shall see God as he is.

Consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, close to Mary's Immaculate Heart, may we go forth from our time together and from these important meetings filled with hope and joy, filled with deepened confidence that the Lord wishes to remove every obstacle from our path as Knights of Columbus in doing the will of our heavenly Father. *Vivat Jesus!*