

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus came to create a new society where there is no room for “them” and “us”. God’s love includes each one of us, regardless of our differences.

Isaiah 45:1. 4-6

God has called each of us by name.

Matthew 22:15-21

Jesus’ enemies tried to trap him with a question about whether or not to pay taxes. Whichever answer he gave could catch him out and lead to his ultimate downfall.

*“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar –
and to God what belongs to God.”*



GOD AND CAESAR

These days Caesar, evil, seems to be all-pervasive, its right there in front of us, everywhere.

It is as blatant as business corruption in the City,
as devastating as Covid-19,

as dark as the drunken teenagers in our cities,
as hurtful as husband and wife betraying each other,
as terrible as abuse in the Church,
as overpowering as homelessness in our cities,
as tyrannizing as drug addiction in young and old,
as scarring of life as easy divorce,
as jarring as the war in Syria and in Nagorno-Karabakh,
as explosive as those terrorist bombs,
as loud as a suicide bomber.

Caesar, Evil, like a great cosmic, malicious, spider, spins a web in all our lives. We're all caught in it. A priest who witnessed the planes hitting the burning Twin Towers in New York said that he instinctively knew he was witnessing what Pope John Paul II called the "mysterium iniquitatis", "the mystery of evil".

The mystery of evil: deep, non-stop, pervasive, enormous, mind-boggling evil. It seems that almost every day we're faced with its terrible reality. Just reading the papers, it's as though Satan had been let loose on the world. People feel nervous, frightened, unsafe, on edge in an unpredictable world. We don't feel safe from pandemic, terrorists, family betrayals, or sudden, unexpected violence: we, as it were, keep looking over our shoulders. As we look around, we are perhaps silently asking the question everyone has asked since Noah's flood: "Where is God in all this evil?" Yes, even people like us, who have a relationship with Christ, and know that somehow, in some way, we can catch a hint of an answer, even we are a bit uneasy; we're a bit worried.

There isn't, I'm afraid, a direct answer to questions about God amidst all the Evil. But there are perspectives, a way of looking at things. For example, looking at the Bible, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, you can see two main streams of power throughout history.



“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God.”

Caesar and **God**. The first stream is evil, which takes hold of the good and defaces it, wrecks it. Since the Fall, we do live in a world that is dominated by powers tilted toward evil.

On the other hand, however, in opposition as it were, God unleashes a second stream of power: a power to redeem whatever things evil has spoiled. But here’s the catch: at least for the time being, God has chosen to exercise his power through the most unlikely of foot soldiers: **US**, yes us, us flawed human beings. Because of this, it sometimes seems as if God is losing the battle. But, remember, God’s in it, as they say, ‘for the long haul’. The promise we hold on to, is that the quiet virtue of flawed people combined with the power of God’s grace will somehow, in the end, vanquish evil. The promise is that silently but effectively simple decency and the everyday heroism of people will redeem good from what is bad.

The victory is certain. The difficult part of it is, that we can’t see this now because of our limited perspective. It’s a bit like seeing nothing but dense trees as we walk at the bottom of the mountain. But when we get to the top, we catch sight of the clouds, the whole forest, the lakes, the meadows, the waterfalls—we get a different perspective. At the moment, we can see only partially. That’s what gives us doubts and increases our anxiety.

But now and then we do catch the hints of the larger picture. The American priest who, as I said, used Pope John Paul's phrase when he said about witnessing 'the mystery of evil' (he's a Jesuit, by the way, called Fr Jim Martin), anyway, Fr Jim also talks about the stories of self-sacrifice on that same day of the Twin Towers; about the heroic passengers on Flight 93; about fire-fighters who selflessly rushed into doomed buildings; about one of our own Franciscan Friars Fr Mychal Judge, who, against every human instinct of self-preservation, went into the danger to minister to others, and died in the Twin Towers.

This is not to say that this man or the rescue workers in general – even those who lost their lives, were all saints. No. In fact that's exactly the point: they were ordinary human beings showing us the way God is present in an evil world. And, thanks be to God, there are lots of them. There always has been. Those of us who went through the war know that. The truth is that in this world of spectacular evil, God's presence is silently here. Only it's unspectacular,

it's as quiet as a baby's breathing in a manger as killing
soldiers rush by,
it's as soft as the healing of a woman about to be stoned,
it's as simple as a whisper of forgiveness to a tax cheat,
it's as slow as the laboured promise of paradise on a
blood-drenched, insect infested hill called Calvary,
it's as silent as life issuing from a tomb,
it's as subtle as calling the name of a woman who comes
to mourn the dead,
and it's as dreamlike as the Spirit descending on the minds
and into the hearts of fearful, discouraged disciples.

Outside of and beyond the limelight of evil, God's daily presence is

as steady as the lollipop lady at the crossing,
as faithful as a nurse by a bedside,
as tender as a carer to the elderly,

as firm as the hug of a child,
as expected as the morning's first prayer,
and as predictable as those who daily give us clean sheets,
food on the table, clothes on our backs, and comfort in
times of stress and tragedy.

Occasionally at times, that presence is as broad and as eye-catching, like fire-fighters or Mother Teresa.

When you get a sense of being overwhelmed by so much evil, when you're nervous about silent danger, when you are concerned about another war or about all the killing and the violence and the whole performance that sells our newspapers and fill our TV screens, remember that, like a lot of Snow-White dwarfs—or, I suppose I'd have to say nowadays, like a lot of Hobbits—there are countless and nameless people, as it were, tunnelling, under the landslide of evil. One day they'll break through. In the long run, in the 'big picture', as they say, there **is** light at the end of the tunnel – just as surely as there was a resurrection after all the darkness of Calvary.

So be faithful to virtue. Be faithful to your corner of the world, whether at home, at work, or at school, and realise that because you're there God is present. Your honesty, your truth, your witness hastens the breakthrough and give some hope to a weary people—just as your dishonesty and falsehood add to the pile of evil and increase despair.

You count.

I suppose that's the bottom line when it comes to the mystery of evil. You count.

In times of public evil, that's the ultimate answer to the question, "Where is God?"

Softly, quietly, faithfully, unobtrusively, your life, your deeds give the answer: "Here I am! God is here"


WORLD MISSION SUNDAY

Pope Pius XI instituted World Mission Sunday in 1926 at the request of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. It calls us to a renewed commitment to our responsibility to spread the Gospel message. Since the Church is by her very nature missionary, evangelization

constitutes a duty and a right for every one of her members. The Lord calls us to go beyond ourselves and to share with others the blessings we have received, beginning with the gift of faith, which cannot be considered as a private privilege but must be seen as a gift to be shared with people who have not yet received it. Such activity will benefit faith itself since faith is strengthened when it is shared. (Pope John Paul II, 1992).

WORDSEARCH

A	P	H	A	R	I	S	E	E	S	PHARISEES	TRAP	DISCIPLES
S	U	I	R	A	N	E	D	E	E	HERODIANS	TEACH	OPINION
N	H	M	A	S	D	E	T	A	L	MALICE	TAX	HYPOCRITES
A	O	R	T	A	T	I	F	M	P	DENARIUS	MONEY	HEAD
I	N	I	E	E	R	R	D	A	I			
D	E	H	N	C	A	R	O	L	C			
O	S	T	O	I	P	C	G	I	S			
R	T	P	D	E	P	X	H	C	I			
E	Y	E	N	O	M	O	A	E	D			
H	R	E	T	S	A	M	X	T	O			



IDEA FOR LOCKDOWN

What we can learn from St Robert Southwell's 'short pilgrimages'



While he was being hunted down by the Elizabethan authorities during his six years as a missionary priest (1586-1602) St Robert Southwell wrote some great poetry and also some wonderful prose.

In one of his books, 'A Short Rule of Good Life', he gave some advice to fit the very difficult circumstances in which Catholics found themselves during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Like us under this pandemic, they were unable to show devotion to the saints; and again, like us, they were forbidden to go on pilgrimage. They were being stifled under the terrible Tudor lockdown.

One of St Robert's suggestions was that the faithful could dedicate each room in the house to a particular saint. The idea was that, when they walked through the door into a room, they would "enter, as it were, into a chapel or church that is devoted to a Saint, and therefore mentally think about, and do reverence to, that saint."

Taking this idea a bit further, St Robert suggested: 'Don't make this exercise (visiting dedicated rooms) a drudgery' but "not only in the

house, but also in your walks, in your gardens, and in parks do the same: and so make your walk like a short pilgrimage, to visit a shrine.”

You may not be able to go on Pilgrimage at this time, but by dedicating one corner of your garden or the local park to, say,

- (1) St James, another to
- (2) St Peter, a third to
- (3) St Bernadette, and a fourth to
- (4) Our Lady,

you can go on pilgrimage to

- (1) Santiago de Compostela, to
- (2) Rome,
- (3) Lourdes, and
- (4) Walsingham - without travelling hundreds of miles.

In his ‘Short Rule of Good Life,’ St Robert gave lots of practical advice about how to develop this devotion to the saints, ending with these wise words:

“I must take heed that I make not this exercise a toil, but rather a spiritual recreation, and therefore I must not be too eager to do all things on a sudden, but get the habit and custom of it by little and little, for so will it prove an exercise of wonderful profit, easiness, and contentment”.

It may be simple to watch a livestream from Lourdes or an online Mass from Medjugorje, but true pilgrimages change lives when we take time over them, even if we have to start with a stroll around our back garden.

It’s not a bad day today – so I’m off on Pilgrimage to Compostela – in West Ham Park!