

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time
September 06, 2009
Fr. Tom Elliott

The Subtlety of Evil

Isaiah 35:4-7a
Psalm 146
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37

For the last two weeks, we have looked at some of the more blatant forms of demonic activity. While it is important for us to be aware of the existence of such activity, it is also important for us to remember that Satan prefers to work subtly, in stealth. There are really only two reasons for him to be blatant about his activity, either because stealth no longer works in a particular situation and/or he desires to arouse a tremendous fear in the person being attacked. However, Satan always risks pushing someone closer to God by manifesting himself in a blatant way. Therefore, he usually keeps things hidden and subtle.

This week we are going to look at one of the most subtle tactics of Satan—desensitization. What is “desensitization”? To be desensitized to something means that we slowly become so familiar with something that it no longer bothers us. An example of desensitization that is often used is that of a frog in boiling water. If you drop a frog in boiling water, it will immediately hop out. However, if you place a frog in cool water and slowly heat the water to boiling, it will cook to death without noticing the changing temperature. This is similar to what Satan desires to do in the world—slowly corrupt things so that we don’t notice the change.

While there are many forms of desensitization to evil, I am going to focus on just one of them—witchcraft. Because it has crept into the media so slowly, many people are not aware of how saturated our culture is in witchcraft and occult symbols and ideologies. For example, I remember flipping through the channels a few years ago and coming across an advertisement for a new channel geared toward women. The advertisement focused on a cartoon witch, surrounded by occult symbols, instructing women to empower themselves. I was *stunned*! It could have very easily have been an advertisement for Wiccan,¹ since it did not mention anything about the new channel.

No one ever asked me about the commercial (maybe no one else saw it), but I have had countless parents ask me for my opinion about the Harry Potter series. I’ve never read any of the Harry Potter books and I’ve never seen any of the Harry Potter movies, but when people ask me what I think of the series I tell them how important it is for parents to know what their children are reading, watching, and listening to. It is important for parents to talk to their children about what is being portrayed in the media and share with them what we believe as Christians and how what they are seeing or hearing might be different. Satan has been the *most* successful when we or our children no longer know the difference between what is being presented and our Christian values. I learned this very clearly my first year at Christ the King.

¹ Wiccan is the official “religion” of witchcraft, now formally recognized by our national government.

The first school year after arriving at CTK, I used to visit the school children on the playground. One day, a group of about ten girls ran up to me and excitedly asked me if I wanted to play with them. I asked them what game they were playing and the leader of the group responded, “Witches.” I asked the girl how the game was played and she cheerfully responded, “We go up to the other kids on the playground and tell them to die!” I immediately let her know that I did not like that game and that I liked to play “Saints.” She asked me how it was played and I told her that we run around the playground proclaiming, “May God bless you!” to the other students. The girls quickly ran off to play the new game.

What was even more alarming than the game the girls were playing was their complete ignorance as to the game’s contradiction to our faith. Just as alarming was the book fair that same year. It was brought to my attention that there was a how-to book on witchcraft on sale at our book fair. The book was filled with recommended curses and spells to cast on other students. We quickly pulled the book and now we screen the selections the company sends to us.

All of these examples remind us that we have an obligation as Christians to be aware of what we are watching, reading, and hearing and to constantly confirm and support in one another our Christian values. If, like the frog I mentioned earlier, we wait until the proverbial water is boiling, then it’s too late. We need to stay alert. In the words of St. Peter, “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for (someone) to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We must also remain balanced, as the quote from C.S. Lewis two weeks ago pointed out. We should not spend our time decrying everything as evil, nor should we pretend that evil doesn’t exist, but rather, we must stand confidently on the Rock of our faith, Jesus Christ, Who is our hope and our salvation, discerning what is good and what is evil!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Ephesians 6:10-20 as though it were a personal letter from St. Paul to you. Then, write your own response in the form of a letter to St. Paul.
- ✚ Read this excerpt from The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis (chapter 7, pg. 31). It is an older demon writing to his young nephew demon—

Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves... We are really in a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. At least, not yet. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and mythologize their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the [God]... I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping [the one your tempting] in the dark. The fact that ‘devils’ are predominantly *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that... he cannot believe in you.

When have you been “terrorized” by evil in your life? When have you been inclined to deny the existence of evil? Share your thoughts with God.