

## Homily for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever seen a commercial or one of those cartoons before, where someone is in the midst of a really difficult moral decision, and all the sudden, out of thin air, appear on their shoulders an angel and a devil? You know the kind I mean – the angel is usually a goody two-shoes, all dressed in a brilliant white robe, with a halo and a set of wings to boot. Meanwhile, the devil is shown as a little red guy, with a set of pointy horns and a pitchfork he’s waving around. You’ve seen that scenario before – right? And sometimes in life, we might feel like we’re in a slightly less characterized, but yet no less distressing, kind of a situation.

Now, usually what we’re led to believe from this type of set-up is that good and evil are two completely equal forces within us – one no stronger than the other – that the angel and the devil have equal sway over us. But is it really that way? As powerful and as rampant as evil might seem to be in the world today – is it really co-equal with the infinite goodness of God? Again, sometimes it might feel that way, and we might easily relate to that cartoon – but feelings are not facts, and the truth is otherwise.

In our second reading today, we hear St. Paul telling the Romans, “Brothers and sisters: You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit...” At first glance, we might think, “What are you talking about, St. Paul? What do you mean we’re not in the flesh? Of course we are! We’re human beings!”

Now, it's true that St. Paul is using the Greek word 'sarx' here, which translates into English as "flesh". (We get the word 'sarcasm' from 'sarx' – which literally means "to rip or to tear the flesh" – which sometimes a sarcastic comment can do!) But 'sarx' also has the meaning of "the earthly nature of man *apart* from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God." And therein lies the issue. We have this fallen nature that wants to do its own thing apart from the will of God. In short, the flesh tends toward sin, and, as Scripture teaches: "the wages of sin is death". Therefore, St. Paul can write as he did in our second reading today: "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die..." But as he also writes the line I just read: but "you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you."

It is the Holy Spirit who gives life. It is the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus up from the dead that gives us the power to not choose sin, but to choose God. And it all started in baptism. In baptism, we literally entered into the very death of Jesus – the death that He died so we could live dead to sin. And in baptism, we then literally entered into the very Resurrection of Jesus – and we were reborn in the Spirit as adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. Sin was washed away and we received the gift of eternal life from God.

However, even though we have truly become a new creation in Christ, there's still that old nature – that old part of us that's prone to sin and closed off to God that fights back. The 50-cent word for it is “concupiscence” – that inclination or proclivity to sin. And it's this inclination that Satan readily uses to still have a foothold in our hearts that can affect the choices that we make.

In fact as he first did with Adam and Eve, so too do he tempt us to do things our way – to sin – to leave God in the dust! In other words, he coaxes us back to a life based in the flesh. It means that we live (in varying degrees) closed off to God, and we keep ourselves from being vulnerable before Him. And as a result, we end up feeling the suffocating weight of the world; we lack peace; and we wonder where God is in all of it – and that angel and that devil seem to have equal power and influence over us.

But, Jesus shows us another way. And St. Paul with some of the most powerful words he has written gives us the secret: “but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” In other words, “if we let the Holy Spirit dictate our way of living – which leads to an authentic, fulfilled life – then we will have to habitually put to death the evil deeds prompted by the body”. Bottom line: we have to continually choose God's way, and not do what our flesh wants.

For example, when you're talking to somebody, and you have a juicy piece of gossip to share, but feel that nudge not to – obey the Spirit and not the flesh. Or, when someone is driving like a Sunday driver, and you just want to tailgate them, but have a flash of insight that getting there 1 minute sooner is not worth losing your peace – obey the Spirit and not the flesh. Or, when you find yourself judging someone for something you don't like, but realize that you could just as easily draw your attention to something you do like – obey the Spirit and not the flesh.

Again, it is the power of the Holy Spirit living in us and through us that empowers us to live in such a way. And as Scripture reminds us: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”. So, if we just try to do it on our own, without relying on God in the midst of these situations, the flesh will come back to bite us – it's just a matter of time! And the only way you'll ever remember to bring God into these situations at all is if you're spending quality time with Him each day in prayer – really seeking a relationship with Him. There is no other choice.

And so, as we continue our celebration of this Eucharist, and welcome to risen Jesus into our midst under the symbols of bread and wine, let us surrender our flesh-focused way of doing things, and instead, eat His Body and drink His Blood, so that we may truly have His peace and life within us. God bless you.