

## **WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON OUT THERE?**

“Jesus remained in the desert for forty days tempted by Satan.”

Mark 1: 12

Late in the day Ash Wednesday I learned that yet another shooter decides to get a semi-automatic rifle with a lot of bullets and go back for pay back to the school that expelled him. And then yesterday morning I am at my computer and starting to compose my homily for today. I was trying to compose my homily early because later yesterday morning there was a memorial Mass for the 33 year old son of a parishioner who died of opioid poisoning. Then my cell phone rings and it is a lifelong friend calling me to inform me that her nephew, 42 years old, died suddenly the day before probably of an aneurism. He leaves a wife and a small child behind. Sometimes these things are like body blows to the psyche and the soul. They take the wind out of your sails. We have all been in our share of difficult, trying, challenging, unfair, overwhelming and sometimes even evil situations. We have all been bombarded at times by situations like these. We feel very powerless. We have all looked for help. Asked for help.

I must say it is rare in my experience that when I find myself in such a situation that I sense it is because the Lord wants me to be in this situation. But often He does. He wants me there. He wants you there. And He wants me there precisely because of His relationship with me or with you. Because if I wasn't in that situation, or you weren't in that situation, it would be more difficult for the Lord to be there. Or He desires the particular skill sets that you or I have, to be available to assist those in need. I have found, after I do my reflecting, that I am never in such situations alone. The Lord accompanies me into the situation. He is the silent companion on the journey. We are actually yoked together.

Usually I sense none of this at the time. It only becomes clear afterwards. In the moment, I am more aware of my lack, of being uncomfortable, or even afraid sometimes. There are times when He leads me into the dark, into the untamed, wild side of life in this world. Into the desert. It's not like He doesn't know or hasn't been there Himself. Today's gospel reminds us that the Spirit drove him into the darkness and wilderness. He was tempted to take the easy, popular way but He did not. He is described as being among the beasts He must resist. But they do not harm him. Nor, with his protection, will they harm us. But the darkness is often the time of temptation, weakness and tiredness, and sin.

I have come to know and believe that there really is a daily spiritual warfare underway—still—in our world. The final victory has been won. Death has been conquered but there are still all these episodes where evil seeks to destroy and tear down. I am more alert now to the signs of what is going on and where the evil one still

plies his trade. I have come to know my own weakness better too and what the triggers are that lead me to sin and how I must avoid them.

Our experience of this spiritual combat is rarely direct or really evident right in the moment. It is on the underside of things. It only becomes evident after some prayer and some reflection. We ask: What is happening? We ask: Why Lord? But we have to stay with the questions until the answers grow clear. The Lord does not appear to us, sit us down and have a heart to heart talk with us. He doesn't explain things to us. That's not his way. What He does do is invite us into a relationship of genuine care where he looks out for us and shows his love for us.

But then he expects us to remember. He expects us to be grateful. He expects us to understand that He will at times ask us to share in some of the sufferings he endured on our behalf. Sometimes He asks us to look at what he did and what he taught and how he acted. He asks us to look at what he asked of his disciples then. And then we have to apply what we have learned to our own lives now.

Sometimes there will be an intransigent person in our life. Jesus experienced that too. Sometimes there will be stupidity. Many around Jesus did not grasp who he was. There is deceit and calumny. Jesus had many people lie about him, what he did and what he said. There may be betrayal, even by those closest to us. Jesus too knew that. False accusations. The list goes on. The Lord wants us to understand about this spiritual combat and that we really are embroiled in at times. He needs us to be mindful, to learn how to recognize what is really going on and to persist in our faith and trust in Him. It is as if the Lord asks of us what he asked of Peter, James and John: Would you not watch with me one hour? Would you not stay and be with me in my sufferings? Can you not see me in your own sufferings? Do you not believe that I am with you in them, your faithful companion on your own journey?

I say often that there is much more going on in this life than we know. But the Lord invites us to his table each Sunday so we can be fed by his love and learn to cooperate with his grace—in all things.