

TOO MUCH CARNAGE

(The evil in our world must still be confronted, resisted and defeated.
Only with Christ's help are we able to even try.)

So many of the gospel stories are familiar. You may not realize it but the Church uses a three year cycle for Sunday Masses. One year the whole gospel of Luke will be read, Sunday after Sunday. The next year, Mark and the next year, Matthew. John doesn't get its own year but is interspersed a various times around Christmas, Lent and Easter. So every three years you hear the whole of each gospel and that is why you are more familiar with the Scriptures than you realize. Oh, you may not be able to say, "Well, that's Luke 12: 1 but you know the story.

Which brings me to today's reading. You are familiar with this gospel account. Jesus has the apostles do some early polling among the populace to get a sense about what people believe concerning him. Elijah. Jeremiah. John the Baptist raised up and so forth. There is a lot of buzz around Jesus, most of it off target. But Simon Peter proclaims boldly that Jesus is the Christ of God, the Messiah." In Matthew's gospel account Jesus praises Peter and says that the Father has revealed this insight to him. But here Luke has a different take. Here, Jesus rebukes Peter. It is very similar to the "Get behind me Satan," remark when Peter tries to tell Jesus that he doesn't have to suffer.

The reason for the rebuke is not that Peter has spoken incorrectly about Jesus being the Messiah. He is right on target there. The rebuke comes because Jesus knows what "kind" of Messiah Peter is thinking of and he is very much off target there. Jesus senses that Peter is enthralled with the miracles, and the power behind them. Peter has seen the calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Peter has walked on water at Jesus' command. The five thousand fed with a couple of loaves of bread and some fish is another sign. The blind, the deaf all cured. There is a virtual army of people who would rally behind Jesus. And look at the way he takes on the religious authorities and the scribes and Pharisees. Peter bets even Rome won't be able to resist such power. Yes, Peter has bought into the spiritual power part of Jesus mission. Peter is ready to join that army. "I'll die for you." he says on Holy Thursday right before he runs away.

Jesus is the Messiah. The Holy One of God. But Jesus wants everyone who knows and believes in Him to realize that his way will involve facing into evil on a daily basis. It will involve personal suffering and loss. It will call forth the virtues of humility and patience. Each will be called to be long-suffering, persevering, and compassionate. His way will include the ignominy of the cross, the whole unfair, unjust betrayal, abandonment, torture, abuse and horrible death. Jesus rebukes Peter because Jesus wants Peter to get the right picture of not only who the Messiah is but what he will do and how he will act and what it all means—all of it.

Last weekend a young man in his late 20s, a husband and father himself, chose to enter a Night Club with a semi-automatic rifle and ammunition and open fire and shoot over 100 people who were out for a night of enjoyment. Half of those he shot have died. The others are in hospitals. Most very young. Some of those he killed were fathers. All had fathers of their own in some fashion who will never be the same. The whole scene was bizarre and at least surreal. We will probably never really know why. There were so many different dimensions that changed the reality and lent itself to be politically manipulated. Immigrant family from Afghanistan. Muslim religion. American born. LGBT community. Texting and Facebooks posts and phone calls by the killer throughout the ordeal. He was seeking notoriety and celebrity. He had donated his own blood a month before. He turned over assets to other family members. The whole thing looks like it was planned and orchestrated in cold-blooded fashion for quite some time. And all the while the name of God was invoked as justification for what he did.

We ask our why questions but nothing really makes sense. We seek to uncover the underlying meaning. But there is none. There never is where evil is concerned. Evil is real and it is a parasite. It has no life of its own. It must attach itself to another and then it sucks the lifeblood out of that person and then moves on to a new host. That is what evil does. And it is very personal. And always destructive although it does not always appear to be destructive until it is too late. Then we know. So let me reiterate what I said a minute ago. Jesus wants everyone who knows and believes in Him to realize that his way will involve facing into evil on a daily basis. It will involve personal suffering and loss. It will call forth the virtues of humility and patience. Each will be called to be long-suffering, persevering, and compassionate. His way will include the ignominy of the cross, the whole unfair, unjust betrayal, abandonment, torture, abuse and horrible death. But the way of Jesus is the only way through the maze of evil in our world. The way of Jesus is the only way that leads us through the suffering to a new life. And this new life will ever end. In his kingdom there will be no more evil or pain or hatred or fear. His love casts out all of that. And each person has to decide. Am I going to embrace his way of forgiving love—always—or am I going to live by another set of values? You and I have been baptized into Christ. He is the one who is mourned, the one who has been pierced. But he is also the only one ever raised from the dead who will die no more. If we seek hope at times when there is no meaning because of the evil in our world, then Jesus of Nazareth is the one whom we must embrace and whose way we choose to live. Let us turn to him this day for his sustenance and life.