

MORNING PRAYER
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
09.13.20

The list of evil forces that conspired to bring about the death of Jesus is impressive: political intrigue, the distortion of His words, outright lying, jealousy, fear, greed, betrayal, the cowardice of a public official in the face of a lynch mob—these are all evil.

But was Jesus overcome by them? He was not. He says in St. John's Gospel, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And the word that is used there is the same word that St. Paul uses in today's lesson. It means to be defeated. It means to be subdued.

Jesus was not defeated or subdued by the evil forces arrayed against Him. "No man takes my life from me," He said, "I lay it down of my own accord." He used the evil arrayed against Him to bring Him into death in order to overcome it.

Jesus rose from the dead by the power of God. He sits in glory at the right hand of the Father. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. He holds the keys that lock and unlock the gates of Hell. He comes to us when we gather in His name, and makes Himself present in the bread and wine with which our souls are fed. It is the crucified One who has overcome evil and not the other way around.

I need not remind you, however, that evil still exists in the world. We encounter evil every day in one form or another, and in this morning's Second Lesson the Apostle says that we must not submit to it. We must not allow the evil we encounter to defeat us and subdue us. We must overcome it, and we must overcome it with good.

That's how Jesus did it. That's how Paul did it. That's how all the martyrs did it.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to employ the ways of the world to overcome the world. He refused. He chose instead to employ the ways that St. Paul outlines in the Second Lesson that was read in your hearing this morning:

Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good... be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints [by which the Apostle means your fellow Christians], practice hospitality.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

By such means did Jesus overcome evil with good, and, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught us do the same. St. Paul is echoing his Master, and urging us to follow His example.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

We are tempted to retaliate in kind when someone does us harm. But retaliation does not overcome evil; it perpetuates it. Coercion does not overcome evil. The best coercion can do is restrain evil; and that's the job of government.

There is a difference between justice and revenge, and that line becomes blurred when we take it upon ourselves to pass judgment on other people and administer punishment. The objective nature of justice becomes contaminated by our own emotions.

You cannot beat the devil at his own game, and when you resort to political intrigue, gossip, lying, jealousy, intimidation, greed, betrayal, cowardice, you are playing his game. You have acknowledged that evil is stronger than good. You have turned to the devil for help and made use of his resources. When you do that the devil laughs because he knows he has won. You have made a bargain with the devil. Even if you win, you lose, because evil will have prevailed, and you will have submitted to it.

Listen to Jesus. Use His methods. Follow the way of the Cross, for that is ultimately the way of life. Listen to St. Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

That injunction comes with a promise, and with that promise I will close.

If you do what Jesus and His Apostle say to do, and follow the example that they set, you will overcome the evil in your life, just as they overcame the evil in theirs. You may be scorned by men, as they were, but you will receive the approval of God, as they did. You will be called a child of God. You will be given a place of honor in the kingdom of God. You will receive eternal life and a share in the glory of Christ.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Let us pray:

Thank you Lord, for giving us life, in all its amazing diversity and wonder. We thank You that we do need You in all things, and that You are there at all times and in all places. As we pray each Sunday, it is meet and right and our bounden duty that we should in all times and in all places give thanks unto You. Help us to always be aware Lord that we do need You in all things, and to keep our eyes open to your grace in all our lives. This we ask through the infinite mercy of thy Son our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Amen.

Written by: Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Presented by Lay Reader: Ted Randall