

I have to say that in light of the absolutely barbaric school shooting on Ash Wednesday in Parkland, FL that took the lives of 17 innocent human beings and wounded several others, I can't think of a better Gospel passage for today than what we just heard from St. Mark. What happened on Ash Wednesday at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School was nothing short of *pure evil*. And today's Gospel demonstrates that evil *doesn't stand a chance* against God and that *in Christ*, Who *is* the cure and the antidote to sin, *we are empowered to resist* and overcome the evil that endangers us.

While the Gospel today is extremely short, it's inexhaustibly rich. Compared to the Gospel accounts in Matthew and Luke, Mark's account of Jesus' retreat in the desert is certainly an abridged version with only a few details—however, the nature of the event is consistent across the Gospels. Spending 40 days in the desert, Jesus encounters the devil, who's one of the most influential sources of evil. In being tempted by the devil, our Lord Jesus fearlessly confronts evil *directly* and *overcomes it!* In fact, Jesus' victory over Satan in the desert foreshadows His definitive and ultimate victory over evil through His

Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Brothers and sisters, our victorious Lord and Savior is a *constant reminder that good will always triumph over evil* and that in spite of all of the sin, chaos, and suffering in this fallen world, *there is still overwhelmingly more good than evil in this world and we must never forget that.*

Now after Jesus' victory over Satan in the desert, Mark tells us that the first words out of Jesus' mouth as He inaugurates His public ministry are: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" One could say *so much* about these three statements from Christ, but for the sake of time, I'd like to focus on Jesus' last statement here: "*Repent, and believe in the gospel.*"

Notice that the first words out of Jesus' mouth are *not*: "Just be nice, do whatever makes *you* feel good, and believe whatever you want! Do whatever makes *you* happy, even if that means embracing evil and living a sinful and selfish life! You have *your truth* and *I have my truth!*" *#ThingsJesusNeverSaid*. No our Lord Jesus is not some post-modern relativist, but rather the Son of God inaugurates His public ministry by proclaiming boldly: "*Repent and believe in the gospel.*"

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Turn away from sin and evil and turn towards God—*turn towards Me!* Turn away from sin and embrace truth, goodness, and love!” Jesus *never* says, “believe whatever you want”—He says, “*believe in the gospel!*” In other words, “*believe in Me! Believe in the Good News of salvation!*” Jesus *is* the Good News *itself*—He *is the kingdom of God in the flesh!* In His very Person, Jesus *is* the cure for sin and evil that humanity has been waiting for.

By exhorting us to repentance and belief in the Gospel, Jesus is acknowledging the painful and tragic reality of sin, which *is* moral evil, the *same moral evil* that reared its ugly head in Parkland, FL on Ash Wednesday. And like any good physician, Jesus is diagnosing our problem and lovingly offering us a remedy, a cure—and that is *the gift of Himself*, because *He is* our salvation—*He is* our victory over evil.

Brothers and sisters, *trust me*, I wish I didn’t have to talk about sin at all—I honestly wish sin wasn’t real, but our faith isn’t the product of self-deluded wishful thinking. Rather it’s rooted in objective reality. A priest who refuses to talk about sin is like a doctor who refuses to talk about illness and disease. I mean, can you imagine being really, truly

sick and going to the doctor and the doctor claims, “You’re not sick, oh and by the way, there’s no such thing as sickness and disease. So you’re totally fine and you have nothing to worry about.” That’d be insane right? In an analogous manner, just as sickness and disease harm and endanger our physical body, so also sin harms and endangers our eternal soul. Sin and evil are objective realities and if you don’t believe that, just turn on the news, open a newspaper, or go online.

Brothers and sisters, the bottom line is this: if we want our world to change for the better—if we want our beloved country, our culture to change, then ***we must change first!*** Positive and virtuous change in our world and in our culture begins with ***personal change*** that’s defined by ***repentance!*** Virtuous social change begins in our hearts and minds—in the depths of our souls! Because the ***same evil*** that reared its ugly head in Parkland, FL on Ash Wednesday is the ***same evil*** that tempts you and me to selfishly reject Christ and His Church and to commit sin. So if we want to fight evil in our country and in our world, then ***we must first fight evil in our own lives and hearts.*** Positive, virtuous change in the world ***begins*** with hearts that repent—hearts that are humbly open to

conversion and transformation in Christ—hearts that reject sin and evil and embrace truth, goodness, and love.

Now we can't repent or avoid sin unless we first form and examine our consciences according to the teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church. As disciples of Christ striving for holiness, we need to regularly examine our consciences so that we truly know in the depths of our hearts what is right and wrong, true and false, good and evil. So we need a good examination of conscience that can help guide and form us. So in the near future, I'll be posting some examinations of conscience on our parish Facebook page. If you're not on Facebook or don't have access to the internet but would like a good examination of conscience, then simply call the rectory and I'd be more than happy to get you one.

St. Augustine of Hippo, who lived from 354-430 AD and is one of the greatest saints and Doctors of the Church, wisely said, “Bad times, hard times, this is what people keep saying; but let us live well, and times shall be good. *We are the times: Such as we are, such are the times.*” In other words, we should stop complaining about how terrible the times are, because *we are the times* and so if we want the times to

change for the better, then we need to change for the better. And this virtuous change that we seek on a large scale *must begin with our own repentance and ongoing conversion in Christ*. Brothers and sisters, before nations, laws, and societies can change, *hearts must change*. And today, Jesus gives us the formula for this foundational, personal change: *Repent and believe in the Gospel*.

So as we encounter Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, our Lord Jesus Who *is* the cure for sin and our victory over evil, let's recommit ourselves today on the First Sunday of Lent to that repentance which Christ is calling us to. Let's rededicate ourselves today to allowing our Savior to transform our lives so that we can transform our world and our society into a more loving, compassionate, and peaceful place.