

III Lent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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*Ephesians 5.1-14 St. Luke 11.14-28*



We are God's dear children...our friend Saint Paul tells us...and we should try to be like him. Paul goes on to say everything we do must be controlled by love...just as much as Jesus loved us and gave his life for us...as a sweet smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God.

Paul wrote these words to the Church in Ephesus in about 62 AD...probably while he was under house arrest in Rome. Ephesus was a large port city in Asia Minor, present day Turkey. Like the port cities of today...Ephesus was a city of many different cultures and religions.

The major pagan religion in Ephesus was the Diana Cult. Like many of the ancient pagan religions it was a fertility cult. Paul, as we know, was a man who never minced words. He writes what goes on in pagan temples belongs to the "darkness". We are children of the light...Jesus is the light of the world.

Christianity is not about balancing the forces of good (light) and the forces of evil (darkness). We hear in the Last Gospel at the end of every Mass...Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out. The Devil knows he has already lost the war...evil and darkness will never win over the Light of Christ.

Our job as people of the Light that is Christ is to avoid saying and doing the things that lead us away from Christ and into spiritual darkness. Some people commit crimes at night because they think they can get away with it. Paul is especially concerned about this kind of behavior in the Church. Our friend, Paul, the man who doesn't mince words, tells us in the end all things will be brought out into the light, and our actions will be clearly revealed.

It's important for us to understand what Paul is telling us. He is encouraging us to live in the Light of Christ. How we act toward others shows the disposition of our hearts. Jesus always acted for the good of others...we must always act for the good of others. We shouldn't say or do anything we would be

embarrassed to see on the 6 o'clock news. Actions do speak louder than words.

Jesus was a man of action. In the Gospel he heals a man who was possessed by a demon that kept him from speaking. After Jesus healed the man...he could speak clearly. Rather than giving thanks to God for the miracle they had just witnessed, some people in the crowd accused Jesus of having called on Beelzebub...the chief of demons...to heal the man. Beelzebub means "Lord of the Flies" and is another name for Satan.

They then ask Jesus to perform some magic tricks to prove he is God. Jesus knew they were trying to trap him. He tells them the charge he is using Satan's power to heal people is ridiculous. A divided country will not survive any more than a fractured family will. Satan isn't interested in healing...he wants people to hurt. He wouldn't work against himself. God heals people...Jesus heals people...Jesus heals.

Now that we have been healed and brought out of spiritual darkness, we have to replace the evil things we might have done with good things. The man in Jesus' short story who has his spiritual house cleaned and all fixed up let his guard down. He allowed darkness to creep back in. He gave Satan a chance to make his life even worse than before.

Both today's Epistle and Gospel are about doing the right thing, loving others as much as Jesus did. We who are God's dear children...the people of the Light of Christ...have committed ourselves to a life of perfect service to others.

We are trying to be like God when we show love and compassion toward others just as Jesus showed. During the Mass we present *"our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice"* to Our Lord. We want our own thoughts, words and actions to be the kind of sweet-smelling offerings and sacrifices Paul tells us pleases God.

If we try to live our lives this way...not just during Lent but every day of our lives...then we are following Jesus, who is the Light of the World.

