

27th Sunday OT - (Year A) – October 8, 2017

IS 5:1-7; PS 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20; PHIL 4:6-9; MT 21:33-43

Isn't it ironic that, when things go bad, people frequently ask, “**Where is God?**” but when things are clipping along normally, many of those same people *never* ask, “**Where is God?**”

Asking the question in the **first instance** is typically just a **backhanded** way of **blaming God** for the tragedies and difficulties in our lives. **Not** asking the question in the **second instance** reveals the **all-too-common indifference toward God** in everyday circumstances.

Many people are not interested in God when they're *sleepwalking* in their **distracting entertainments and routines**, but those same folks are sure quick to blame God when their lives are disrupted or threatened! It takes **tragedy** to shake most people out of their **trance** to even **think** about God...let alone *turn* to him.

The people of every age always think their age is the worst, but the rapid succession of tragic events in the past few weeks make it hard to believe that it **could** get any worse than we've had it lately. In the last few months, we've been subjected to an endless succession of **hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, terror attacks**, a looming international **nuclear conflict**, not to mention the endless **wars that continue to rage** at hotspots around the globe. The “**tragedy fatigue**” is quite understandable because it seems—to many—that **God** has **abandoned** us.

Obviously, there's nothing we can do to prevent **natural disasters**, even if the mind-shapers in our society, **peddling politics as “settled science”**, try to convince us that we *could* control the climate if we would just trade in our **SUV** for a **Nisan Leaf**.

Ironically, but not *surprisingly*, the **Devil** would have us believe that there's *nothing* we can do to avert the **exploding hatred and violence between peoples** even as *evidence* to the contrary cries out to us from the pages of the **Bible**.

But there's something we must never forget...

The Devil is a liar.

He convinces us that we're in control when we're **not**, and dissuades us from taking control when we *can*. He gets us to worry more about **change in climate**—over which we

have *no control*—than **change of heart**—over which we **can take control** if we simply **turn back to God**.

What does it **look like** when God is **left out** of our ordinary lives?

The **1st Reading** from yesterday's **daily Mass** was from the **Prophet Baruch**. As you listen to these words, imagine that it's **America** in 2017, and not *Israel* 600 years before Jesus, speaking of **the self-destruction it invited** through disobedience to God:

God has brought great mourning upon me, for I have seen the captivity that the Eternal God has brought upon my sons and daughters. With joy I fostered them; but with mourning and lament I let them go...For the sins of my children I am left desolate, because they turned from the law of God. Fear not, my children; call out to God! He who brought this upon you will remember you. As your hearts have been disposed to stray from God, turn now ten times the more to seek him; For he who has brought disaster upon you will, in saving you, bring you back enduring joy. (Bar 4:9-12, 27-29)

The **Prophet Baruch** catalogs the consequences that God's people suffered when they continually rejected him. The collective punishment of the people was the just reward for their collective disobedience.

And what is true of the **community** is also true of the **individual**—because a rebellious **society** is simply a collection of rebellious **individuals**. Recall the **1st Reading** from **last Sunday's Mass** from the **Prophet Ezekiel**, God said:

You say, "The LORD's way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair? Are not your ways unfair? When the just turn away from justice to do evil and die, on account of the evil they did they must die. But if the wicked turn from the wickedness they did and do what is right and just, they save their lives; since they turned away from all the sins they committed, they shall live; they shall not die. (Ez 18:25-28)

The death God speaks of here is not mere **physical** death, but *eternal* death.

What is eternal death? Hell.

What is Hell? Eternal separation from God.

Who is God? *God is love* (cf. 1 Jn 4:8).

So, what is Hell?

Eternal separation from love—from *all relationships*. From relationship with **God** and relationship with our **neighbors**. The **exact antithesis** of Christ's **Dual Commandment**.

When we expel God from a society—either through **deliberate action of God's enemies** or **indifference from his friends**—we have no right to be surprised when all hell breaks loose. When we tell God—**by word or by action**—that he's not welcome, he withdraws **from** us...so much does he respect the free will that he **gave** us.

In both the **1st Reading** and the **Gospel** for today, God provides a “**vineyard**” for his people. The Biblical reference here is the **Promised Land** that God provided his people after their **Exodus** from Egypt.

When **America** was founded, many people considered the escape from **religious persecution** in **Europe** to the **New World** to be a *modern-day Exodus* and *America the new Promised Land*. In both cases, the people saw God guiding the journey. And in both cases—then and now—the people turned against **the God who saved them**.

Isaiah chronicles **God's reaction** to the **people's rebellion**. As you listen to these words, see if you notice an **eerie parallel between the destruction of the vineyard** and the *disintegration of our own nation...today!*

What more could be done for my vineyard that I did not do? Why, when I waited for the crop of grapes, did it yield rotten grapes? Now, I will let you know what I am going to do to my vineyard: Take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled! Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but will be overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to rain upon it. (Isa 5:4-6)

Here we have a picture of a **rotting society**, with **no protecting wall**, a **dry, barren, lifeless, thorn infested ruin**...overrun by **wild animals** feeding on the ugliness.

Is it not *rot* that we see when we watch a **Super Bowl Halftime Show** that looks more like an **orgy** or **Satanic liturgy** than a music show?

Are not our **families and homes left open to invasion** when kids as young as 10 years old get hooked on **pornography** through unmonitored **smart phones and tablets** provided by their parents as “**electronic babysitters**”?

What right do we have to lament the **dry, barren, lifeless culture** around us that is **overflowing** with *technology* but **devoid** of *love*, when we *block life at its beginnings* with **contraception**, and *snuff it out when it's little and helpless* through **abortion**?

How long can we pretend that we don't **contribute** to the violent culture that **produces mass shooters** when we fill our minds with violent **movies**, violent **video games**, violent **sports like "cage fighting"** and when we extol **violent protesters** as champions of "**free speech**"? Our casual ingestion of violence gives birth to the violent culture around us.

The fact is, we cannot blame God for the disintegration of our **nation**, our **institutions** and our **families**. It wasn't *God who created us* who is to blame. It is the **false "gods" we created** that have turned against us...and turned **us** against *each other*.

When the world is imploding around us, we look for someone to **blame**. We want to know what caused the **shooter in Las Vegas** to **rain down death** on his unsuspecting victims so we know what to do to prevent it. We want to take **action** rather than feeling **helpless**. This was summed up in a **Facebook post** that someone wrote after last Sunday's shooting:

"I felt numb...I feel such a loss of control and a realization that there is nothing an individual can do to stop these horrible things from happening...I want somehow to fix things and make them stop."

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/10/03/storms-quakes-fires-korea-and-now-vegas-shooting-whats-next/725889001/>

With all due respect to this person, I must disagree. It is simply **not true** that "*there is nothing an individual can do to stop these horrible things from happening.*"

The problem is not that we are **helpless**. The problem is that we are **indifferent**. The problem is that we don't accept the solution because we consider it too **simplistic**.

There is only **one way** we can push back against the darkness of a **sex-obsessed, violent, selfish, dangerous** world. And it has nothing to do with **partisan politics** or **public policy**.

The only way to oppose the evil in our society is to become its opposite.

What is the opposite of evil?

Holiness.

So, if we want to crush evil, we must become holy...genuinely holy.

If the **early Christians** could outlast a **Roman Empire** that tried to **exterminate** them, there's no reason that **we** cannot redeem **our own nation**. But we must decide to become holy people. Not "good people" by someone's easy-to-achieve definition.

Holy people!

The sooner we realize that the violence around us is a mere **shadow** of a much bigger **spiritual battle**—the more effectively we will oppose it. **St. Paul** wrote to the **Ephesians**:

...we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit... (Eph 6:12-18)

To understand what we must do to drive the false “gods” out of the vineyard and reclaim it for **God** and for **ourselves**, we can take a lesson from an unlikely source:

Satanists.

When Satanists mock God, what do they do? They perform a ritual called a **Black Mass**. They make a *sacrilegious mockery of the Catholic Mass*.

Why?

Because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the direct opposite of Satan.

Satan doesn't mock **Bible studies**.

Satan doesn't mock **worship services with comfortable seats, espresso drinks and a hipster band**.

Satan mocks the Catholic Mass.

Which should tell us something important about what the **most evil being in all of creation** considers **most holy and sacred**.

If we want to crush Satan we must worship Jesus in the Eucharist. Not just by going to **Mass once a week**. But also by *praying regularly before the Eucharist* in the **Church or the Adoration Chapel**.

By having our own **Holy Hour**—same day, same hour, every week.

If we want to wield the **most effective weapon against Satan**, we must pray the **Rosary...DAILY!** Why would the Devil be deterred by the intercession of a “**gentle woman**”? Because this woman—**Mary—the Mother of Jesus and our Mother**—is, in her very person, the **exact opposite of Satan**.

She is **pure**. And she is **humble**.

Satan is utterly corrupt so he is **repelled by purity**. And because he does not possess a shred of **humility**, he is **confounded by humility**.

If we want to live in **fear** and **despair** about what’s going on around us...*the game plan for that choice is to spend lots of time in front of the television and no time in front of the Tabernacle*. Perhaps we should kneel in front of the TV when we watch the news, so there’s no mistake what kind of idolatry we’re practicing.

If we want to feel **helpless**, we can **wring our hands** and **complain**.

Or we can take our **Rosary in hand**, as we kneel before the **Real Presence** in the **Eucharist**, and implore God for his mercy.

We celebrated the Feast of **Our Lady of the Rosary** yesterday, which commemorates the naval **Battle at Lepanto** in which the Christian navy routed a much more powerful Muslim Ottoman fleet because **Pope Pius V marshalled a supernatural fighting force** to assist in the battle. He asked the people of Rome to pray the Rosary on the day of the battle...and even the weather changed to ensure a victory for the Christian Navy! Because of that action, Europe was saved from **what the seemingly inevitable** Muslim domination that many people had resigned themselves to submit to.

If one day of praying the **Rosary** could spare **Europe** from **Muslim tyranny** in the 16th Century, **imagine what a daily Rosary prayed by every American Catholic would do to push the rotten evil out of our lives, our homes, our institutions and our nation** in the 21st Century. Imagine if the words “**In God We Trust**” were not merely **printed** on our **currency**, but **inscribed** in our *hearts* and reflected by our *lives*. Imagine the effect of our holiness on our circle of influence, not to mention in our hearts, if we were truly faithful.

Many Catholics are afraid to **evangelize**—to *proclaim the Gospel in word and deed*—and so they remain *silent* about their faith in the face of **tragedy** and **sin**. But just imagine this:

The next time you’re speaking with a family member or co-worker who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus and Mary, and you’re lamenting together about the

darkness in the world, how hard would it be to interject a comment like this into the conversation:

“You know, if I didn’t have my Catholic faith and prayer life, I would probably completely lose hope with the hell that’s constantly breaking loose around us.”

In one simple comment, you have **proclaimed your faith**—you have *evangelized!*—and you have **offered an avenue of hope** to someone who may be “this close” to despair. And you did it with **no pressure whatsoever**. You planted a seed that very well might bear fruit in that person’s life because they have looked everywhere else **but to God** for some sense of **stability**...and have come up empty.

St. Paul wrote these words to the **Philippians** in our **2nd Reading**:

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

The only way to oppose the evil in our society is to become its opposite.

And turning back to Jesus through Mary is so simple *even a child can do it*.

Is it any wonder, then, that **Our Lady of Fatima** entrusted the **message of conversion** of the world 100 years ago to **innocent children**?

Jesus said, earlier in the **Gospel of Matthew**:

“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 18:3)

And in **today’s Gospel**, he said:

“...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.” (Mt 21:43)

When next Sunday rolls around, will **Jesus** and **Mary** be *any more prominent* in your prayer life and daily life than they are *today*?

The answer to that question will determine whether or not the Kingdom of God will be **given to you**...or **taken away from you**...not to mention the world *around* you.