

“Remember who the real enemy is.” This is one of the prominent and memorable lines from the movie *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, the second film in the 4-movie series. If you’ve never seen *The Hunger Games*, I encourage you to check it out – it’s a compelling story of the battle between good and evil. Without getting into all of the details of the story, it’s a young adult fictional epic that’s really an effective commentary on what can happen to a culture when there’s a total disregard for human life and dignity. ***“Remember who the real enemy is.”***

In today’s Gospel from Mark, our Lord Jesus reminds us who the real enemy is. I always find it fascinating that in Mark’s Gospel, the first person, outside of St. John the Baptist, to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God is a demon. In today’s Gospel, we hear of Jesus fulfilling the divine role of Healer and Liberator in His public ministry and our Lord fulfilled this role as an exorcist. Anytime Christ encounters a demonic possession, He lovingly liberates the possessed person through His own divine power and authority as the Son of God.

Notice in today's Gospel that the demon acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God, but he does so *out of fear, not* genuine faith. The evil spirit knows and fears the power of Jesus and so he's terrified of the Son of the God's ability to destroy his influence. The fact that our Lord Jesus drove this demon out of the unnamed man in today's Gospel points to the fundamental mission of Christ, which is to destroy the power of evil once and for all. And our Lord certainly accomplishes His mission through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. The reality is the devil and his demons have already lost the war and so they're on a sinking ship trying to drag down as many souls as possible with them.

***“Remember who the real enemy is.”***

This reminder is important in light of today's Gospel, but also in light of St. Paul's powerful letter to the Ephesians, when in chapter 6 verses 11-12, the Apostle to the Gentiles writes: “Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.

***For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.”*** In other words, our *real enemies* are

*not* our fellow human beings: my spouse or family member who I constantly fight with, my friend or co-worker who's at odds with me, those who disagree with me politically, etc.

Rather, our *real* enemy is the *devil* who seeks to destroy us and will do anything to achieve that goal. The devil and his minions are our real enemies and they *thrive on hateful division*. Their ultimate strategy is to divide and conquer through hatred and sin. The devil loves nothing more than to pit us against each other – all for the sake of our destruction. The evil one and his demons, who are the sworn enemies of human nature and the human race itself, tempt us to hatred of *ourselves and others*, whether they're spouses, children, family members, friends, co-workers, political opponents, etc. The devil and his minions *love* to destroy human lives, marriages, families, friendships, communities, and yes, even entire nations. Satan seeks our destruction and he seeks it with a hateful ferocity.

So if we think our real enemies are our spouses, family members, friends, co-workers, political opponents, etc. *then we need to think again, because we're being played!* It's so easy to think that the people

in our lives are our enemies, when really, *all of us can fall for the traps, deceptions, and temptations of the devil to sin against each other and hate each other.* Brothers and sisters, our *real enemies* are the demons who tempt us as human beings to sin. Our real enemies are the evil spirits who help to encourage and inspire evil in the world.

Now make no mistake, there certainly *are* human beings in the world who seriously believe in and strongly support objectively evil things. There are *certainly* human beings who hate us and the Catholic Church and there are human forces within society and politics who truly support objectively evil things and seek the destruction of the Church. *Their* actions, ideology, and sociopolitical agenda should be vigorously opposed. But here's the thing: you can *oppose something without hating someone!* *And you can affirm something without hating someone.* This is the crucial distinction that the devil does *not* want us affirm! He just wants us to blindly hate others and seek their destruction. The devil doesn't want us to love our enemies with the desire for them to encounter Christ and to help them grow in holiness.

The devil doesn't want us to love others and seek their salvation, but rather he wants us to hate others and seek their destruction.

So the way we counter the devil's temptations in this area is to embrace the seemingly difficult teaching of Christ, when He says, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28). Our Lord Jesus is talking about those human beings who hate and mistreat us—those human beings whom we consider to be our enemies.

Now some of you may be thinking, "Father, this is all crazy talk – you talking about demons and the devil." Well yes, I am talking about demons and the devil, not because I'm crazy, but because *they're real*, and we must acknowledge their existence and active influence in our lives and in the world. Talk about movie quotes, one of the best lines in a movie comes from the 1995 crime classic *The Usual Suspects*, when Kevin Spacey's character says, "The greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world he didn't exist." If we deny the existence of the devil and his demons, then they have already won and frankly are in control of us. Clearly, from today's Gospel, Divine Revelation affirms

the objective reality of demons and their activity and influence in the world. This isn't some crazy, fairy-tale talk, this is the reality of a temporal existence in which evil spirits roam the earth and seek nothing less than our personal destruction, the destruction of marriages, families, friendships, and the collective destruction of our human family.

***“Remember who the real enemy is.”***

I'm so glad Bishop Schlert and many other bishops around the world have reinstated the St. Michael the Archangel Prayer and asked us to pray this powerful prayer either during or after the liturgy. When we pray the St. Michael prayer today at the conclusion of the Universal Prayer, pay close attention to all of the words and pray them wholeheartedly with an active consciousness knowing that God is calling us to *hate evil*, but *love our neighbor*.

As disciples of Christ, we must always know who the real enemy is and *love our neighbor*, regardless of what our neighbor says or does to us. Brothers and sisters, if our Lord Jesus Christ can love and forgive those who mocked, tortured, and killed him, then we can love and forgive those human beings in our life who may wrong us and mistreat

us. This is the measure of a true disciple of Christ and **yes** it's hard, which is why we need to depend **entirely** on the grace of Christ, lovingly poured out to us through prayer, the sacraments, and the Church.

*If we know who the real enemy is*, then we will love our fellow human beings more, forgive them more, and pray for them more. As disciples of Christ, we're called to love **as He loves** and be merciful **as He is merciful**. We're called to see others as our Heavenly Father sees them: as his own beloved children who are called to true happiness, holiness, and salvation. The more we recognize that the real enemies in our life are **not** our spouses, family members, friends, co-workers, and political opponents, the more we will love and forgive as we should, the more we will seek to reconcile and be peacemakers—the more we will grow in holiness.

So as we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, the One who definitively conquered and destroyed the power of evil through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, let us ask the Lord for the grace to love our neighbor and **never** forget who the real enemy is.