

The Good Shepherd might lead us to green pastures, but the Holy Spirit leads us into the desert to confront evil just as Jesus did. No one is preserved from this confrontation. We must all make moral choices. We must all face spiritual testing. This is the only way that we mature spiritually.

We see this testing going on around us all the time. Will you side with the truth? This is the fundamental confrontation. On Easter Sunday, we will be asked to renew our baptismal profession of faith.

The first three questions are about this confrontation: Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his empty show? There are a few things that Jesus wants us to know before we have to face this confrontation again.

First, God is more powerful than Satan's evil. This is critical. We tend to be overwhelmed by fear in the face of evil. It might threaten our job, our reputation, and even our life. God is not afraid. Lean on God for strength and guidance.

Second, evil, in some mysterious way serves God's purpose. It is in our confrontation with evil that we mature into our full self. Another way to say this is,

God is more interested in our growth than in our happiness. Our moral growth is very valuable to God. God wants us to be people who stand up for the truth, especially when it is difficult, when it hurts.

Going along with evil, with untruth, is the easy way. It is also the empty way. It will not lead to happiness. It will not give us control over our own lives. Indeed, we hand control of our life over to the lie.

We are very vulnerable to the empty promises of evil. The Holy Spirit leads us into confrontation with these empty promises, so that we will find the strength to resist. Jesus gives us a two-step spiritual practice to help us overcome evil.

Step one: repent. Be honest about who we are as opposed to who we want people to think that we are.

Step two: Believe in the gospel; the Kingdom of God is at hand. We began reflecting on this a couple of weeks ago. The Kingdom of God is right in front of us. The present moment has all the possibilities and challenges that we need.

A further dimension of Jesus' proclamation is that Jesus himself is right in front of us. Everything that we need to overcome evil is present. This confrontation with evil is not some abstract, theoretical evil. We are confronted with moral choices all the time. Some are more critical than others, but all are important.

God knows that we do not always succeed. Sometimes we give into the lie, but can we learn from this failure? Repent and believe the good news. God wants us to grow. We learn much from our mistakes, if we let them teach us.

The only way to be truly alive is by confronting evil. The Holy Spirit leads us out into the desert. God will never give up on us.