

This is one of those weekends when there are about a dozen things that I could talk about, but a homily shouldn't sound like headline news or a press conference, so just one very important announcement. The dispensation from attending Sunday Mass is going to be rescinded in two weeks. This goes into effect on Friday, July 16. I hope to see everyone at Mass that weekend unless there is a serious reason for not attending. If you have a question about what qualifies as a serious reason, you can ask me later. The gospel for that weekend tells us about the disciples returning to Jesus after he sent them out two by two. When they returned, they were worn out but also excited about their adventures so Jesus decided to take them to a deserted place so they could rest in his presence. Some of us will be coming back after a long absence. All of us need that time to rest in the presence of our Lord. That is what the Mass is supposed to be: a time and place for us to be in God's presence and give him the praise, glory, and thanksgiving that he is due. In return for that, he gives us an even greater gift. The gift of the Eucharist, the true body and blood of Jesus. You cannot receive Jesus' Eucharistic body virtually. He is physically present for us; we have to be physically present for him as well. So spread the word: it's time to come back to Mass.

Today's readings raise a number of questions, some of which are fairly easy to answer, others not so much. To me, the most troubling ones are the ones raised by Saint Paul. In the second reading, Paul is wrestling with the problem of evil and suffering. He accepts his suffering, first of all, because when he begged for the suffering to be taken away, the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you." From this, Paul learned that his sufferings were serving a higher purpose and that his weaknesses allowed Christ to come in and make him strong. This is how we must deal with evil and suffering in our lives. We must unite our sufferings to the Cross of Christ and trust that he will use them for a higher purpose. His grace is sufficient for us.

That's how we deal with suffering, but why is there suffering at all? This goes back to that second question in the proclamation of the gospel, "If God is all good and created everything to be good, what happened? Why are things so messed up? We were seduced by the lies of the enemy, Satan...and led into sin...and suffering is a consequence of sin. You guys can go back and read Genesis to find out how this came about, but even Genesis doesn't give an answer to the big question, "where does evil come from." How does evil come into a cosmos created to be good? It came about through the gift of free will. God does

not force us to love him and he does not force us to do his will. He allows us to choose and it's in that ability to choose that things went wrong. This happened first through Lucifer, the angel of light, who freely refused to serve God and his plans. Lucifer fell and took a bunch of other angels with him; we now call these spiritual beings Satan and his demons. Their rebellion against God is the source of evil.

This is where things get tricky. In order to get at the nature of evil, I'm going to greatly simplify things. Theologians: please don't come after me for this over-simplification. Evil isn't a power that exists on its own. Saint Augustine said that evil is a privation of the good, meaning that something isn't as good as it should be. That's a little too abstract for me. I prefer another way he states it which is to say that evil corrupts what is good. Bishop Fulton Sheen refers to evil as a parasite on the good. Both of these concepts of evil tell us that evil cannot exist on its own. It has to feed on and corrupt that which is good.

Think of where we see evil at work in our lives. For example, those email and text scams that I keep warning you guys about. The most recent versions of these are that the scammers are contacting people asking them to buy gift cards so that the parish can give them out to people in need. Giving out gift cards is a wonderful sign of love for our neighbor. However, the evil intentions of the scammers have corrupted it because when you buy the cards, they ask you for the numbers on the backs of the cards and use the money for themselves. This is happening everywhere, not just in the church, but it's especially effective in the church because we are so focused on helping our neighbor. These scammers are parasites, feeding on our good works for their own benefit and harming us in the process. Evil corrupts what is good.

I need to mention another example of this as we celebrate our national Independence Day. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Declaration of Independence. "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Preamble to the Constitution. These good and noble sentiments were set down by our founding fathers when this nation was

established. I don't think there is another nation founded on such high ideals. But it didn't take long for evil to come in and corrupt what was good. In order to form that more perfect union, our founding fathers compromised with the devil and made provisions for slavery in the Constitution. Historians and politicians can debate the intentions of the framers of the constitution and the effects it had on slavery and racism in our nation, but as Catholics we believe that every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Anything that detracts from the dignity of such a person is a sin. I am a fierce patriot. I love my country. But I love her too much to ignore her sins and I love her too much to not do what I can to atone for those sins. I also love her too much not to expose the one who is having such an easy time sowing the seeds of sin and tearing her apart...which is what I am planning to do next weekend.

Let me end on a more uplifting note. Besides being Independence Day, July 4th is also the feast day of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. A great patriot who loved God, his church, and his country. Italy one hundred years ago was not very different from America today. I am going to close with a quote from him and ask for his prayers in the battles that lay ahead of us: "We who by the grace of God are Catholics must steel ourselves for the battle we shall certainly have to fight to fulfill our program and to give our country, in the not too distant future, happier days and a morally healthy society. But to achieve this, we need constant prayer to obtain from God that grace...without which...all our powers are useless." Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us
Saint Joseph, terror of demons, pray for us. Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, pray for us.