

Today's gospel told us that Jesus gave the twelve apostles authority over unclean spirits and then sent them out on a mission. While they were travelling around, they cured the sick and drove out many demons. That was from Mark's gospel. Matthew's account of this tells us that Jesus told the Apostles to proclaim the kingdom of heaven wherever they went; Jesus was sending them out to proclaim the good news of the gospel. Today's second reading from Saint Paul is sort of a poetic summary of the good news of the gospel. In one of Paul's other letters, the letter to the Romans, Paul tells us "I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." The gospel is power. The power of God for salvation. The greek word that Paul used for power is "doo-na-mis;" this is the word from which we get our word dynamite. The gospel is not just good news. It's explosive good news.

Is that how you think of the gospel? Fr John Riccardo, a priest from the Acts 29 apostolate who has been doing a lot of work with the priests of the archdiocese wrote in his book, "Rescued" that the reason we don't think of the gospel as explosive good news is because we don't know or understand the bad news. If we don't grasp what would have happened to us had Jesus not rescued us from our captivity, we miss what is extraordinary about the gospel.

I was trying to think of an image to help us understand the bad news and the image of Johnny Cash lying in the dark of Nickajack Cave outside of Chattanooga Tennessee came into my mind. Cash struggled with drug addiction for most of his adult life. He finally got to a point where he didn't want to live anymore so he crawled into a massive cave complex. His intention was to go so far in that he couldn't find his way out again and he'd be dead before anybody found him. He crawled for three hours until his flashlight burned out and he was exhausted. The absolute lack of light was appropriate, for at that moment he felt as far from God as he had ever been. He just lay there and prepared for death. But then something happened. He realized that although he thought he had left God, God hadn't left him." God infused hope into his soul and Cash knew that wanted nothing more than to live. But he had crawled three hours into a cave. It was pitch black with no light, sound, or smell to lead him out.

Imagine being in that situation. Trapped in a cave, wanting to live but not being able to find your way out into the light. This is what Satan wants to do to us. We are created to be good. As inherently good creatures, our natural movement is back towards the source of all good, God himself. Satan's greatest desire is to cut us off from God and keep us in the darkness of sin so that we can't return to God. That's what hell is. It's wanting nothing more than to live in the light of God but being held captive where we cannot reach him.

Why does Satan have such hatred for us that he'd want to keep us from experiencing God's overwhelming goodness? Envy. Envy is one of the deadly sins. Envy is the sadness we feel over the good fortune of another. Envy makes us so sad, in fact, that we wish the other person didn't have the good fortune they're experiencing. A very simple and very common form of envy is the rejoicing we feel when that hated rival sports team loses a game or the anger we feel when that same team wins a national championship. That's envy. A mortal sin. I have a feeling the Confession line might be a little longer next weekend.

Why is Satan envious of us? In God's plan, the angels were intended to serve as messengers between God and the rest of creation. This would mean that they would have to serve human beings who were of far less power and excellence than themselves. In the minds of Satan and the demons this was an insult to them so they rebelled against God. They envied the good fortune that was being given to mankind so they decided to try and destroy, enslave, and degrade us and everything else that God created to be good.

The devil has a number of tactics that he uses to cut us off from God and keep us trapped in the dark. All of these in some way go back to his main strategy which is to convince us that God is actually our enemy. He accuses. For example, he asks us why didn't God stop the pandemic? It's because he doesn't care, or maybe he's weak, or maybe he's not even there. Satan lies. For example, he tells us "you are no good. After all your sins, there is no way that God or anybody else can ever love you." He divides, he flatters, he discourages and he tempts. No tactic is too low for him to use on us to keep us isolated from each other and from God. He will do anything to keep us trapped inside that dark cave with nothing to show us the way home.

The explosive good news of the gospel is that God sent his son into the darkness to find us and rescue us. For Johnny Cash, that meant an impulse to move. And that's what he did, he just began to crawl around in the dark. Eventually he felt a gentle breeze. He knew that if he turned into the breeze, it would lead him out. When he finally crawled out of the cave he found his future wife, June Carter, waiting for him at the entrance to the cave with his mother, food, and drink. The women told Cash they knew something was wrong and felt led to come and find him.

Just like June Carter and Carrie Cash, God always comes after us and there is nowhere we go that he can't reach. He found Johnny Cash in the depths of the cave and was present in the gentle breeze that led him into the light. He'll do the same thing for us. The devil wants to keep us trapped and he'll do anything to make us think that God is our enemy. Don't listen to his lies. God never speaks to us in a way to drag us down into terror and despair. He always wants to lift us up. Yes he may correct us and that doesn't always feel very good, but he does it with love in order to unite us more closely to himself. He doesn't want to leave us trapped and alone in the darkness. He sent Jesus to rescue us, bring us into the light, and feed us with the true food and drink of heaven: his very own body and blood.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, pray for us  
sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary  
Saint Joseph, terror of demons and pillar of the family, pray for us