

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year “A”

Between Good and Evil in the world

If you have struggled with understanding why bad things happen in the world, you are not alone. This has been a human project in every generation. The earliest attempts by human beings to explain the *raison d'être* of the universe gave birth to this notion of a universe set in motion for an eternal struggle between good and evil.

Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions have stories of the battle between good and evil which human beings happen to find themselves at the center of it. “By way of fairy tales, this primeval battle of “good vs. evil” is ingrained into us as children through our stories: Merlin vs. Morgan le Fay, Saint George vs. the Dragon, David vs. Goliath, Snow White vs. the Witch, and even Luke Skywalker battling Darth Vader.”
— Dan Brown, “The Lost Symbol”.

Some theologians even go further to interpret this deeply ingrained sense of a cosmic battle as proof of the existence of God. From the Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the persecution of Christians in the book of Revelation, the stories remain that of a struggle between good and evil in the world.

You may know the story of Prometheus – because of his actions, “The first mortals lived on earth in a state of perfect innocence and bliss. The air was pure and balmy; the sun shone brightly all the year; the earth brought forth delicious

fruit in abundance; and beautiful, fragrant flowers bloomed everywhere.

Man was content. Extreme cold, hunger, sickness, and death were unknown. Jupiter, who justly ascribed a good part of this beatific condition to the gift conferred by Prometheus, was greatly displeased, and tried to devise some means to punish mankind for the acceptance of the heavenly fire.

With this purpose in view, he assembled the gods on Mount Olympus, where, in solemn council, they decided to create woman; and as soon as she had been artfully fashioned, each one endowed her with some special charm, to make her more attractive...

Their united efforts were crowned with the utmost success. Nothing was lacking, except a name for the peerless creature; and the gods, after due consideration, decreed she should be called Pandora.

They then bade Mercury to take her to Prometheus as a gift from heaven; but he, knowing only too well that nothing good would come to him from the gods, refused to accept her, and cautioned his brother Epimetheus to follow his example.

Unfortunately Epimetheus was of a confiding disposition, and when he beheld the maiden he exclaimed, "Surely so beautiful and gentle a being can bring no evil !" and accepted her most joyfully."

You probably know the end of the story or would like to explore more of it.

The parable of the wheat and the weed is not another attempt by Jesus to support the belief in an eternal struggle between good and evil but Jesus charismatic way of teaching us that good and evil are not the opposite ends of a continuum. The world created by God is fundamentally good. Evil is an aberration in the order of things. As darkness is the absence of light, so is evil the absence of good. Evil deeds may be more visible in the world, yet, we are reminded today that human beings are not the product of an evil power. Human beings are not at the mercy of evil (devil, Satan). Evil, like the weed planted among the wheat provides a struggle which challenges the human soul to choose good over evil.

Evil challenges us to discover our humanity and to work hard to preserve it. "Many people seem to think it foolish, even superstitious, to believe that the world could still change for the better. And it is true that in winter it is sometimes so biting cold that one is tempted to say, 'What do I care if there is a summer; its warmth is no help to me now.' Yes, evil often seems to surpass good. But then, in spite of us, and without our permission, there comes at last an end to the bitter frosts. One morning the wind turns, and there is a thaw. And so I must still have hope." — Vincent van Gogh

Is evil an anomaly or a necessary part of life on earth? Ding SGD writes "But you know what? There will always, always be a darkness to balance the light. There will always be a negative to every positive. But here's the thing. It only takes one light to banish the darkness of an entire world." (pg. 412

- "Descent"). The mandate to avoid evil also obliges us to do good.

Nature may appear distorted by evil and sin, but nature is fundamentally good. The struggle to preserve the goodness in nature is the project of the living - "The idiots fail to understand the difference between education and intelligence. What good is education if you are learning the wrong things. (Page 156 and 157 Against the Tides.)" — S.L. Benelli, "Against the Tides" Evil can be thought, learn what is good.

We need to acknowledge the roles human nature, society and unjust structures play in leading us to believe that human nature is fundamentally evil or that nature must be suppressed in order to lead an honorable life or for the good to emerge. The good does not depend on evil; hence evil should never be construed as a necessary part of being. God in his infinite wisdom has allowed both good and evil to have their time in the scheme of things until the end time – the judgment time. However, such should not be an excuse for a child of God to remain inactive whenever the forces of evil are wreaking havoc on earth. Plato the philosopher writes in the Republic "On the other hand, I can't not defend her, since I can't help feeling it is wrong to stand idly by when I hear justice coming under attack, and not come to her defense for as long as I have breath in my body and a tongue in my head. So, the best thing is to make what defense I can."

It goes to mean that the battle or the struggle between good and evil, light and darkness within the human soul is one we will continue to fight since human beings are created fundamentally good. "Good does not triumph

unless good people rise to the challenge what is around them.” — Alister McGrath

Therefore, it is up to the individual to struggle to overcome the pull towards a corrupted and abusive way of life in order to embrace the good in us and in the world.

As Rachel Held Evans puts it, “If you want to do violence in this world, you will always find the weapons. If you want to heal, you will always find the balm. With Scripture, we've been entrusted with some of the most powerful stories ever told. How we harness that power, whether for good or evil, oppression or liberation, changes everything.” Become the wheat, not the weed and it shall be well with you.