

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent Year “B”

February 17-18, 2018

Readings: Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

Collegiate mascots and accompanying nicknames are most certainly a curious phenomenon, especially when they take on a diabolical character. In collegiate athletics we have the Duke Blue Devils<sup>1</sup>, the Arizona State Sun Devils, and the unusual combination found in the Baptist founded Wake Forest University Demon Deacons. True enough, we have the Crusaders, Angels and Saints as nicknames. I found eight schools nicknamed the Blue Devils, two nicknamed Blue Angels, and seven were the Saints. In sports as in life, the battle goes on and it is a long way from being over.

When I have expressed my belief in a real being known as Satan or the devil, I occasionally receive raised eyebrows. Innocuous cartoon images do not help, but conveniently mask a much deeper reality. Their perception has been so altered by the cute manner by which we portray the devil. There seems to be no middle ground. People either deny the devil, while others seem obsessed with the existence of the evil one. The Church steers a healthy middle ground.

Sin entered the world through our first parents—this is the constant witness of Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. Because we are irrevocably linked by means of the human nature we share, we too were affected by this first choice. The existence of the devil is mentioned hundreds of times in the Scriptures, and repeatedly throughout the Church’s Tradition. The movement from admitting the existence of evil in a general sense to a belief that this evil is a **being**, a creature—this is much more difficult for some to see.

*As Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:*

Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into

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<sup>1</sup> A little research reveals that for Duke university, the name is traced to a French nickname given during World War I to the Chasseurs Alpins (Chas-sir alpon), the French Alpine light infantry battalion.

death out of envy. [Cf. Gen 3:1-5; Wis 2:24] Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil". [Cf. Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9]<sup>2</sup>

As powerful as the tug towards evil can be, we must not despair. The power of evil is not absolute. Evil is a tremendous mystery, because God could have chosen to protect us from all evil, not allowing us to fall into sin. In a 1972 General Audience Address of Pope Paul VI the Holy Father frankly admitted that “when the problem of evil is seen in all its complexity... from the point of view of our limited minds... it poses the greatest single obstacle to our religious understanding of the universe.”<sup>3</sup>

We are in need of a balanced and accurate understanding of the reality of evil in our own lives and in the world. The horrific school shooting in Florida has once again caused unfathomable pain, raised serious questions about mental health issues, about warning signs, about background checks and legal requirements to own guns.

The account in this morning's Gospel is proof that Jesus underwent all that we experience as pilgrims on the way. He was not immune to the temptations that can keep us in bondage to sin, be it a temptation to despair if our work or studies are a source of struggle or frustration, or the temptation to want to exercise too much control over own futures. He did not succumb, and his valiant witness gives us the resolve to continue for another day.

As bearers of God's manifold kindness, our patience with the faults of others becomes a conduit of Christ's love. As people of hope, we help to stem the tide that some may feel towards despair, when on the surface, they are overwhelmed.

As witnesses of faith, we tirelessly proclaim the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and pray that we will be faithful signs of a love that is

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<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, para #391.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI, General Audience of November 15, 1972

more powerful than temptation, more lasting than immediate gratification, and ultimately more joyous than could be possibly imagined.