

Homily for October 11, 2019

Friday of 27th Week of Ordinary Time

Manitoba, used to be a free-for-all territory. Nobody was tough enough to put it in order. Lawbreakers and six guns poured in. Every time it was swept out, it made more room for more lawbreakers. Finally, Samuel Benfield Steele came. He was 22, so tall and thin he had to wear a sash under his tunic. He was promoted to inspector of the Northwest Mounted Police, and made them Mounties. He trained them in 36 degrees below zero weather. He was ordered with a party of 25 horsemen to Calgary to police the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The riot came when he was sick in bed, but he got up and coldly faced a mob of flashing knives with a drawn pistol and singlehandedly faced down the mob at a narrow bridge. In the Canadian WHO WAS WHO there is this sentence about Samuel Steele.

"His coming meant order. His presence meant justice. His name was worth a regiment."

We live in a world that is like this unruly frontier. There is a battle between Jesus Christ, our Samuel Steele, and the devil, who governs the unruly mob. The word demon (daimon) is connected with the Greek verb meaning to "tear apart" or "divide".

May I suggest to you this morning something we know to be true but perhaps refuse to recognize. There still present in our world forces which "tear apart" and "divide" our frontiers. We are a people possessed with desires that force us into deeds of evil, unless someone stronger than the evil one is present there will be confusion and chaos.

In our modern western world where we have swept the house clean of any acknowledgement of God we see on our screens, the most horrific evil in shows and movies. The depravity that we can view is indicative evil spirits being welcomed into so many homes and souls. This is a society where anything goes. All the while we live under the illusion that we are sophisticated, egalitarian and free. The tragedy is that when we live in this illusory world for too long, the illusion become our only reality.

How do we move away from living on the illusory frontier that is so unruly? Look at the parable. Jesus states that a strong person must guard his or her goods. In other words, we must all stand up and take responsibility for the stuff we create. We can't live under the illusion that there's a scapegoat responsible for everything that happens to us. We have to be responsible for our own life.

Secondly, we cannot labour under the illusion that religious decisions made long ago are going to work for today. Our life and our values don't stay neutral, they need to be continually renewed. If we sweep the house clean and don't keep our lives centred in Christ than as we read in Joel there is an army that is a legion of devils that will come in and take over. Joel called the people to a kind of spiritual action where their solidarity against the evil forces required a daily commitment to godliness.

What an important parable this is in Luke's Gospel. It has two great meanings for us: 1) we have to be responsible for our own lives every day and 2) every day we need to be spiritually attentive and alert those forces that would want to come into the frontier of our lives and take over.

Today the Church remembers a man who lived attentive to this parable's teaching and knew all too well the spiritual forces that want to come into our lives and take over. St. John XXIII was canonized with St John Paul II in 2014. He was a man of deep, faithful prayer and like Samuel Steele His presence meant justice.

Justice is rendering to someone what is due to him, or in more common parlance, doing the right thing. When he was nuncio to Turkey and stationed in Istanbul in the early years of the Second World War, Archbishop Angelo Roncalli saved the lives of many Jews who were threatened by the Nazi terror. Taking advantage of Turkey's neutral status and the Vatican's diplomatic connections, Roncalli arranged for transit visas and in some cases forged baptismal certificates in order to facilitate the transit of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine. In the process, he rescued around 24,000 people who otherwise would certainly have found their way to the death camps. That this act of extraordinary justice also called, furthermore, for considerable courage goes without saying.¹

He also had the wisdom and foresight to know that the world that was dawning in the aftermath of World War II needed a Church positioned to better know how to relate to that burgeoning new world and so he called Vatican II to help prepare the Church for the 21st century.

Thanks be to God that Pope John, also called the Good Pope, was a modern day Samuel Steele who was able to help bind the strong man and so make room for Jesus.

¹ <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/the-virtues-of-saint-john-xxiii/>