

### Homily for October 13, 2017

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.

Jesus told this parable about an empty house because the people of his day were living under certain illusions. Much of our Bible is about how evil uses illusion and seeks to take over our lives. In the Gospel reading, the religious leaders were under the illusion that Jesus was in league with the Prince of Evil, Beelzebul, a name that meant "Lord of the Flies or Lord of the Dung". It is always the devil's way to distort our perspective.

Living under an illusion can be a horrible thing. Think for instance how at present there is the geo-political threat to stability as North Korea lives under the illusion that they can take out the United States and the reciprocal rhetoric the United States uses to counter these threats with the President's tweets.

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 then 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.

We can never rest on past commitments. Rather like today's psalm states we need to pray:

***I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.***

***I will tell of your wonderful deeds.***

***I will be glad and exult in you.***

***I will sing praise to your name, O Most high.***

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.

The power of evil is that force that in this world can seem stronger than the power of God, as the passion and crucifixion of Jesus would suggest. Evil seemed to triumph on that day. We cannot live under the illusion that life is devoid of conflict. The battle is intense and the stakes are very high. There is a strong man who wants to tear the world apart and is doing a very good job.

We need to stay vigilant and alert and with Jesus Christ, our Samuel Steele, confront the mob head on as we pray in today's Collect:

***Keep your family safe, O Lord with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection.***