

1st Sunday of Lent "C" 2010

I. When you read the lives of the saints, especially the older books, you can get the impression that they lived in a different world than we do. Many of the saints describe physical encounters with Satan. St. John Vianney, the parish priest of the village of Ars, whose relic we have in the back of the Church, describes Satan beating him up, rattling the windows, setting his bed on fire-all in an attempt to prevent him from saying Mass or hearing confessions. And in this fight, he had a great weapon, a simple one-line mantra "Get behind me, Satan!". He said Satan left him in peace for a while even though the torments lasted for 20 years.

II. Such language sounds pretty weird and even superstitious to us. Not many of us have ever had Satan pop up under our beds or outside our window and begin to beat us up. Or have we? Who or what is Satan? Believers today are split as to whether or not they believe Satan is an actual person or simply a symbol for a venomous power that can overwhelm you, strip you of moral strength, and leave you with a sense of having been beaten up. Just ask Tiger Woods! Either way, whether you believe that Satan is an actual person or a symbol for evil, temptation, and lack of moral strength, the encounter that the Saints describe happens to us in our rational, agnostic lives just as surely as they happened to pious believers in former times.

III. Satan, scripture tells us is the prince of

jealousy, bitterness, paranoia, obsession and lies and few things beat us up as badly as these. We speak of being "obsessed" while Saints speak of being "possessed". It's just a difference of words. Like saints of old we need to learn the mantra "Get behind me, Satan!".

IV. Every time our minds and hearts begin bitterly replaying, life cassette tapes, old conversations, old wound, old rejections so that everything in us wants to scream "this isn't fair", "How dare he say that!", "How can she do that after all I did for her!", we are being tormented by Satan and need to say "Get behind me, Satan!" or there will be no you until these obsessions leave us alone.

Every time we feel a deep emptiness inside and our world feels flat because we are obsessed by someone or something we can't have, we need to say "Satan, get behind me!". Heartaches, especially frustrated loves, drain joy out of life and deaden all our manageable loves. Satan doesn't come at us like a demon with a pitchfork, rather he torments us in restless, romantic fantasies. Every time we feel disappointment because of our marriage, career, or even morals that haven't turned out as perfectly as we'd like, whenever we find it hard to be grateful for the way our lives have turned out, we need to say "Satan, get behind me!".

V. Satan is alive and well. We call his presence: obsessions, heartache, restlessness, jealousy, fear, old hurts, insomnia, chaos. Like the Saints of old, we need at times when we feel strong enough to wrestle him openly in the desert, and we need to whenever our fears

beat us up, to say the ancient prayer "Get behind me,
Satan!".