

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

From Jesus' day to ours, when bad things happen to good people it seems easier to blame God or Satan. That God can bring something good out of such an accident is grace building on nature. What Jesus confronts in today's Gospel is "The-devil-made-me-do-it" theology. And his response is as challenging now as it was in first century Palestine.

For as long as we blame our most destructive behavior on evil acting upon us in all its guises, empty promises and powers, then we remain some way from taking the sort of responsibility for the condition of our hearts that might see them fully converted by Christ's saving love. This is not to say that evil does not exist or that it cannot have a powerful effect upon us, quite the opposite. Just as grace builds on love and goodness, evil grows out of estrangement and hatred. As Christians we hold that God has given us free will, and evil's hold on our hearts is often the result of the poor choices and smaller compromises we have made along the way.

The way we look at the evil in our lives and the world also affects our compassion. For if we're not in touch with the greed that leads to theft, the anger that leads to murder, the desire for power that leads to rape, or the alienation that leads to terrorism, then it's hard for us to be compassionate toward the perpetrators of these evil acts. The degree to which we know what our hearts are capable of leads us to be grateful for the graces we receive and cultivate, and to be compassionate toward those who have missed out on this good news and who, by nurture or free will, have chosen evil as their fundamental option.

May this Eucharist enable us to take in the broken body of Christ because we know we are a broken people in need of its power, and as Christ's blood is poured for us, may we be poured out in love, so that, through us, others might hear His call to a conversion of heart.

Fr. Eric T. Carpine, ofm