

THE THIRD ORDER

Of the Society of St. Pius X



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Dear Postulants and Professed members,

The word "evil" has not entirely disappeared from modern language¹, but what in fact does it mean for people now? The word itself is only 1 letter away from "devil", and this might be partially responsible for the identification of evil exclusively with darkness, violence, fierce hatred and everything that makes one uncomfortable. Evil certainly *can* be these things, but it is only a partial picture, and a deceptive one at that.

A little reflection reveals evil to consist basically in "the absence of the good which should be in any particular being". There is evil in a trodden-down rose, in a bird with only one wing, and in a man who has cancer. In all these examples there is an impediment to the attainment of the things' end. Unless these evils are removed, the rose cannot give fragrance and colour to attract its proper insects, the bird cannot fly south to keep warm in winter, and the sick man cannot support his family.

Man has an ultimate end that goes beyond the termination of his bodily life, because his animating principle (a spiritual soul) has no parts that can decompose by death. His end and goal is a thrilling, eternal gaze upon all that which is perfect and entirely fulfilling: God Himself. As seen in the above examples, evil is not something positive, but negative, like black holes in space, which are supposedly not merely an absence, but a positive threat to the existence of the good things that surround them. As the rest of Gods' creatures mirror Him in their various degrees of perfection in that they have existence, life and sensation, so does man mirror Him also, but *much more closely*. As a spiritual being, man can know and love, which means that by his *mind* he can bring other things *inside* his soul, and by his *will* he can go *outside* of himself to be united with an external object. But these distinguishing characteristics of man (knowing and loving) necessarily involve *freedom*, whereby we can *freely* choose between alternative means (none of which force our consent) to attain our end.

God's law in our soul, as well as His law as told us through Revelation, informs us how we can *most closely resemble our Creator*. For example, the prohibition of telling lies demands that our external communication with others corresponds with our internal thought. How does this resemble God? Well, for example, His wonderful act of external creation places beings in existence whose perfections are truly a reflection of His interior Self. The ocean is a true (although finite) representation of His immensity, and the sun is a true representation of His power. We might say there are no "lies" in His creation, as all creatures are by nature what He *wills* they be, and are also *true* to their patterns existing already in Him.

When we freely choose to place an action that will *not* resemble Him, we sin. The word "sin" implies more than the word "fault", because while the latter refers to an evil action as offending *men*, the former refers to the offence before *God*. Obviously then, if one doesn't believe in God (which is at best a logical absurdity), then one doesn't speak of sin.

We said above that many view evil as exclusively external, dark, violent and repulsive. But the fact of the matter is, the most serious form of evil, *moral evil*, is *entirely invisible because immaterial*. The will which sins, whether human or angelic, is a spiritual power, thus involving nothing that can be smelled, touched, seen or heard.

Our Faith tells us that a portion of the angels fell. Upon being created, they reflected (only a spiritual being can do so) on their great beauty, but instead of looking from the *effect* to the *cause* of that beauty (God), they wilfully gazed on the effect alone. Despite what our imagination might put together, this fall and "battle" between the good and bad angels did *not* happen amidst lightning, thunder, smoke, agonizing screams and burning sulphur. To our eyes in fact it would have been no more disturbing than a calm spring dawn, because it was entirely spiritual activity, and yet it was the most profound evil imaginable. Modern man would see the fire, brimstone and screams of Sodom and Gomorrha as the true evil, and nonchalantly pass over the preceding heinous violations of God's most basic laws which merited the punishment. Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, said the prophet.

¹ It is simply too powerful a word not to be used now and again to brand without rational argument all that is in fact good.

Of course the internal spiritual evil of sin may be *externally manifested*, and have external effects, but these are secondary. Sin is a disease of the **will**. This is why Our Divine Lord said that one sins gravely by the mere *interior consent* to lust after a woman, regardless of any consequent external action. This also has an important bearing on our imputing of sin to our neighbour. Sometimes another's behaviour *appears* to be sin to us, but for various reasons their will did not choose evil (we say it is thus a "material" sin). For example, Robin Hood may have been honestly convinced (maybe by a bad clerical advisor!) that stealing from the rich was not sinful if the riches were to be given to the poor. In such a case it would externally *appear* like a sin (to a well-trained cleric) without being so in fact. Likewise a modern Catholic, through lifelong poor instruction and preaching, may genuinely believe that attendance at Mass on Sunday is optional. In that case there is "material" (or outward) sin in failing to attend Mass, but not "formal" (or inward and real) sin.

We all know those scriptural words referring to the devil disguising himself as an "angel of light". Perhaps we think he only does this *sometimes*, as we might occasionally dress up to go to a fancy dress night. Not at all. More surely than my black cassock is *my* usual uniform, so is *his* usual getup "sugar and spice and all things nice". This is not to deny that God sometimes allows him to appear as a grotesque beast, but that is *his* fancy dress, used only to frighten and lead certain souls to despair. If he is to lure us into sin, he isn't going to use things which repulse us. If we want our enemy to take poison, we don't entice him with the bottle the poison came in, nor do we put it in a glass of smelly sour milk. We put it in a glass of fine Merlot. Evil must be "clothed" in *good* to make it appetising, as physical ugliness is sometimes clothed in make-up, and bitter medicine is sweetened. If the "good" is "that which every being seeks", then the only way the devil can have us swallow evil is to make it attractive or "seekable". Thus, to choose moral evil is to be fooled by the external, accidental aspect of something, without taking the trouble to peel away what is on the surface. When we are tempted to sin, the fine Merlot is put to our lips, but it is up to us (and God's grace) not to immediately open our mouth eagerly, but to first ask a few questions. This is why we have reason, and if we form our conscience well, we will *know* what questions to ask before taking the sip.

Since our first parents sinned, there has always been a mysterious attraction to evil in man, but we must remember that it is not *evil* which attracts him, but the **good** with which evil wraps itself. Man is prone to be deceived, but he is definitely not attracted to evil as such, which is an impossibility. How can the above truths help our daily drive for sanctity?

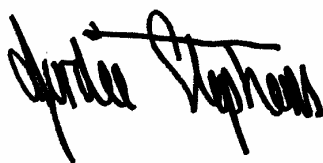
Pay as little attention to externals as possible, both in yourselves and others. Familiarize yourself with ideas, and for this it is necessary to read. On the contrary, the more we wilfully surround ourselves with "entertainment" (ie. A bombardment of the senses without any constructive goal), the more we will be deceived by sensible externals. The animal (or sensible) man perceives not the things that are of God, says Saint Paul. The most generous and godly souls are often cocooned in bizarre and off-putting vesture, and the most devilish souls can be very "nice" and adjusted.

Get to know good things, beginning with God, the wellspring and source of all good. The more we know good things, ie. Complete and perfect things, the easier we will recognize evil, without having to experience it, as did, and do, the Saints. A wine connoisseur recognizes a bad wine from his knowledge of good wine. Adam and Eve were mistaken in thinking that to "know evil" one needed to experience it.

Lastly, **try to repair the moral evil in yourselves and others**. Grace needs channels to work, and it can only be engrafted on souls by human intermediaries. St James says that he who brings back an erring brother saves his own soul from death and covers a multitude of sins. We have the wonderful power of forgiving others, and with supernatural grace we can even forgive our enemies. God takes away the evil in our souls by forgiving us, but He will only do so if we also pardon others.

If we are not Saints yet, having still a good deal of evil in us, let us take heart in the wise words "every Saint has a past, but every sinner has a future".

In the Sacred Heart, through the Immaculate heart of Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordie Stephens". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Fr Jordie Stephens
Spiritual Director of the Third Order of SSPX for Australia