



20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 19, 2018
Homily by Rev. Raymond McDaniel

Our first reading on this past Wednesday's Holy Day, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, came from the book of Revelation, chapter 12, which describes a mysterious woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth." The choice of this reading for the Marian feast shows us that one interpretation of this passage is that the woman in labor is Our Blessed Mother, mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Interestingly, these words have also been interpreted to mean the Church, mother of believers.

The passage goes on to mention another sign that appeared in the heavens: "an enormous red dragon who... stood in front of the woman... so that it might devour her child the moment he was born." At the end of the passage, when the woman had given birth and been rescued from the dragon, the dragon became enraged and went off to "wage war against the rest of her offspring – those who keep God's commandments and hold fast to their testimony about Jesus."

There is no confusion as to who this dragon represents. This dragon is, of course, the devil. He has never ceased to wage war against the Church. Although Jesus Christ has won the ultimate victory, the dragon that is Satan still works tirelessly against Jesus Christ and those who follow Him. While his attacks often come from outside, we have seen in recent weeks how, tragically, sometimes the devil has the help of those within the Church.

As our bishop has noted in recent statements, "ministry in the Church is a grace from God that carries with it a sober responsibility. [It] is not a right to be claimed by anyone as an entitlement; rather, it involves a covenantal trust established through our Baptism as members of the Church established by Christ."

Recent news from Pennsylvania and regarding the case of former cardinal McCarrick has spoken of alleged major violations of that sacred trust, resulting in damaged lives, a crisis of faith, anger, sadness, and shock. The alleged perpetrators, who by their vocations were specifically charged with tasks like nurturing the faith of young people, leading others closer to Jesus Christ, and serving as a bridge between God and His people, have engaged in actions which have led to the exact opposite effect. Victims' lives have been permanently marred, as well as the lives of their nearest and dearest. The faith of countless souls has been shaken, and in some cases, lost completely. The Church's credibility has been deeply bruised, and the priesthood, which I continue to believe is populated largely by faithful souls seeking to lead lives of holiness and to lead others to Christ, seriously tainted. The dragon's work continues, sometimes to truly devastating effect.

We are grateful for the strong leadership of our Bishop, which has been shown not only in the prompt action undertaken when credible accusations are received, but in his clarion call for holding accountable those whose inaction allowed these sins to continue, including other bishops and cardinals. We are also grateful for the ongoing efforts of our staff and volunteers to keep St. Philip's a Safe Environment for all the faithful.

As your pastor, I share the anger felt by so many against the evil perpetrated against innocents. I feel the shame their actions have brought on the Church, on the priesthood, on the Catholic Faith. I am anxious, lest some find these reprehensible behaviors to be the occasion of giving up on Jesus Christ or His Church.

Like you, I am deeply upset at what certain bishops have done, but, as one holy shepherd said recently, "we should never be ashamed of the Church, because we know that it is pure, and that it is Christ Himself, alive for us in the Church, who alone is our way to salvation. There is a great temptation that our justified anger over these gravely immoral acts will lead us to lose faith in the Church... instead of [being] angry with those who, even though they held the highest authority in the Church, have betrayed that authority and have acted in an immoral way." (Raymond Cardinal Burke, Interview by Thomas McKenna, catholicaction.org, August 16, 2018)

To give up on Jesus Christ or His Church would be to give the dragon a huge victory. Going forward, then, what can we do?

1. Pray. Pray for our Church and for the Holy Father, who is the only one who can supervise bishops. Pray for God's healing for the victims and mercy for the perpetrators, and pray for those whose faith is shaken. I invite you to make a special effort to attend this Wednesday's Holy Hour after our 6:30 PM Mass, a time of coming before Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist to pray for reparation, healing, and justice for the sins

recently brought to light. Along with the profound sympathy we all feel for the victims of these crimes, we must not forget that Our Lord too has been offended; that He too weeps over the sins committed against the innocent by those who have betrayed their sacred callings.

And please pray for your deacons, priests and bishops. There is a war being waged, and the clergy find themselves on the front lines. We count on your prayers so that we may fight effectively under the banner of Jesus Christ. I have placed the statue of Our Lady of Fatima before the altar, to encourage us all to seek her maternal intercession during this time of great need, and she will stay there a while because we must continue to pray.

2. What others have torn down, let us work to build up. Now is no time to retreat, despite our discouragement and anger. Now is the time to work harder for the kingdom of God. Let us hold fast to our testimony, and let our witness for the truths of our faith, especially on matters like the family, marriage, human sexuality, chastity, and the universal call to holiness ring out loud and clear in our words and in our actions. Let us work together to make this parish a beacon of goodness, truth, beauty, and love, not only in the words we proclaim but also in deeds, so that souls so hungry for Jesus Christ, the true Bread of Life, may encounter Him here.

The great soldier-saint Ignatius of Loyola envisioned a great battlefield with two opposing armies, one led by the sinless Lamb of God under the banner of the Holy Cross, the other army led by the dragon, under a foul banner of filth and sin. Ignatius reminds us that this struggle is the most real, the most important, the most significant reality that is going on around us, whether we are paying attention to it or not. All times, but these times with a particular urgency, call us to take our place, not on the sidelines, but firmly and loyally to locate ourselves under the banner of the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ, in Whom alone is our salvation.

As we have been so painfully reminded, the dragon is real, and recent weeks have shown that his continuing efforts to tear down the Church of Jesus Christ are still highly effective. We will stand up to this dragon in the power of Christ, Crucified and Risen, confident not in our own strength, but in the Lord's ultimate victory over evil and death.