

4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 1:21-28

In the 1995 film, "The Usual Suspects," there is a line: "Who is Keyser Soze? He is supposed to be Turkish. Some say his father was German. Nobody believed he was real. Nobody ever saw him or knew anybody that ever worked directly for him, but to hear Kobayashi tell it, anybody could have worked for Soze. You never knew. That was his power. The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. And like that... [h]e's gone." It draws on a quote from 1864 of Charles Baudelaire in "The Generous Gambler": "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

Since the Enlightenment and the primacy of science and reason apart from faith the idea of the Devil and demons is mocked and ridiculed as superstitious nonsense and an old-fashioned idea that went out years ago. Yet the Gospels are filled with references to Satan and demons. Some today argue that at the time the Gospels were written people misunderstood psychological disease as demonic. But once we reject Satan we can too easily begin to reject God. If there is no such thing as demons and the evil they spread then can we really believe in God and the grace that He grants to us? So Hell is denied and all that remains is Heaven for everyone, whether we love God or not.

Throughout the history of humanity there has been a constant pressure on man to reject God, even to hating Him. Many philosophers have argued that God is nothing else than a limitation to the greatness of man. Today we see this in atheistic ideologies that argue that religion is the cause of the alienation of man; the cause of war and terror and ignorance. It has led us to the point of relativism where what is true for me is not necessarily true for you, that there

are no absolutes any more; nothing is absolutely right and nothing is absolutely wrong. In denying the Christian God there is the denial of Christian morality so that we no longer look to God for meaning and identity but become gods ourselves. There is nothing new in this. It is the same trick that Satan pulled on Adam and Eve when he persuaded them that they should not be children of God but rather like God Himself. It is the sin of pride that has infested the soul of man since the beginning of time and we have become rivals with God.

The great trap the Devil laid for humanity was the lie that says that there are no consequences to our sins. I can commit sin without sorrow and I shall still attain Heaven because how could a God is all-loving deny me paradise. It is a trap that denies my complicity in evil, that denies that I have any responsibility to myself or to others, and it calls this freedom. The irony is that it is nothing but enslavement because it undermines my humanity because it undermines my ability to choose good and evil, to be able to love and hate, to choose for myself.

But God has granted us true freedom, so that we can break the bonds of evil and soar to the heights of grace. But we must choose this. We must recognise that evil exists and we must confess that we have contributed to evil because only by this confession can we defeat the disease of pride. Only then can we recognise the beauty of humility that allows us to place ourselves before God as we truly are and to know that it is only His grace that strengthens and perfects us.