

### **February 14, 2016 Be Sober and Vigilant Homily:**

Brothers and sisters, when the filmmaker and award winning actor Mel Gibson, a devout Catholic, announced his plan to make a film on the Passion of Christ, I shuddered. I feared the consequences of directing a religious film in one of the most secular cities on the planet. I suspected “all hell would break loose”, and I was right. Mr. Gibson came under a sustained and merciless attack, especially by the enemies of the Christian faith. But what occurred to Mr. Gibson in the wake of the hugely successful film saddened me. His long marriage ended; He was picked up for driving while intoxicated; He fathered a child out of wedlock with a much younger woman whom he refused to marry; He was black balled in Hollywood. The major studios spurned him! He appeared to age prematurely. In short, his life was on the verge of a total collapse! Why?

The first Sunday of Lent is known as Temptation Sunday. Today's gospel from St. Luke is an account of Our Lord's temptation in the desert. The erstwhile Pope, Benedict, once asked a rhetorical question: Why has Satan vanished from our Christian vocabulary? Why have many of our theology books omitted any reference to Satan? And his answer: “The disappearance of Satan goes hand in hand with the disappearance of holiness. The more visible and powerful holiness becomes, the less the devil can conceal himself.” The lives of the great saints of our tradition bear witness to the inspired words of the bishop. Wherever you find a holy person, there you can find the Evil One. One thinks of Satan's battles with St. Teresa, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena and Blessed Padre Pio.

In the gospel of St. Mark, the demons speak of Jesus as “the Holy One of God”. In today's gospel, Satan thought he could tempt the hungry Jesus with bread but he failed. Undeterred, he tempted to allure him with a promise of fame and power. Again, he was unsuccessful. But he remained persistent. St. Luke informs us: “When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.” (Lk. 4:13).

Once the passion of our Lord begins, “Satan entered into Judas”. (Lk.13:2) On the cross He was faced with His final temptation: “Let him save himself, if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God”. (Lk. 23:35) If nothing else, Satan was relentless. And he continues to be a most personal and fearsome power today! Some years ago the then Archbishop of Paris, Jean Marie Lustiger was interviewed by a French Journalist, a skeptic and unbeliever. The journalist asked the Cardinal if he believed in the existence of Satan. “Indeed, I do”, replied the Archbishop. “But, your eminence”, protested the questioner, “in this age of great scientific achievements and the advances in technology, you can still claim to believe in the devil?” By, now, he was exasperated. “Not only do I believe the devil exists”, insisted the Cardinal, “I have seen him.” “When did you see the devil?” “In the year 1942.” “Where did you see him?” “At a German concentration camp during the Second World War: Auschwitz!” Silence ensued.

On Ash Wednesday of the year 2006, Pope Benedict offered the following reflection at the beginning of the Lenten season: “Every day, but particularly in Lent, Christians must face a struggle, like the one Christ underwent in the desert of Judea, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil, and then in Gethsemane, when he rejected the most severe

temptation, accepting the Father's will to the very end. It is a spiritual struggle waged against sin and finally, against Satan. It is a struggle that involves the whole of the person and demands attentive and constant watchfulness". Dear brothers and sisters, the forty days of Lent is a time of spiritual training. To be fully armed, we must receive Our Lord in the Eucharist and be attentive to his Holy Word. By uttering the name of Jesus, we can surely be equipped to do battle with the ancient enemy of the human race.

Mel Gibson rendered an important service as a Christian witness for the sake of the Church. In the flush of success, he may have let his guard down. Perhaps his story serves as a warning for all of us who are committed to Christ. Let us recall the words of St. Peter in one of his letters: "Be sober and vigilant! Your opponent, the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour". (1Pet. 5:8).

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle!