

## Pastoral Reflection 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time

In an effort to update Jesus' call to mission i.e. "he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives etc." I am sharing with you Richard Rohr's take on our "contemporary mission".

For most of history we believed that evil was almost exclusively the result of "bad people" and that it was our job to make them into good people. We thought this alone would change the world. And sometimes it worked! Yet only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did popes and many moral theologians begin to teach about corporate sin, institutionalized evil, systemic violence, and structural racism. These very words are new to most people, especially ones who benefit from such illusions.

I believe personal evil is committed rather freely because it is derived from and legitimated by our underlying, unspoken agreement that certain evils are necessary for the common good. Let's call this *systemic evil*. However, if we would be honest, this leaves us very conflicted. We call war "good and necessary," but murder bad. National or corporate pride is expected, but personal vanity is bad. Capitalism is rewarded, but personal gluttony or greed is bad (or, at least, it used to be). Lying and cover-ups are considered acceptable to protect powerful systems (the church, political groups, governments), but individuals should not tell lies.

Thus we now find ourselves unable to recognize or defeat the tyranny of evil at the ostensible, invisible, institutionalized, and entrenched level. Evil at this stage has become not only pleasing to us but idealized, romanticized, and even "too big to fail." This is what I call "the devil" and Paul calls "the thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" (Colossians 1:16) or "spirits of the air" (Ephesians 6:12). These were his premodern words for corporations, institutions, and nation states. Anything that is deemed above criticism and hidden in the spirit of the age will in time – usually in a rather short time – always become demonic.

As regards money and evil, money's meaning and use is highly obfuscated by small print and obscure vocabularies which only highly-trained economists can understand: annuities, interest ("usury" used to be a major sin!), non-fiduciary, reverse mortgages, and more. Yes, the devil is in the details! The ordinary person is left at the mercy of these new clerics who alone understand how we can be "saved" by the "infallible laws of the market" and the "bottom line" of everything. They use the language of religion and transcendence to speak with a kind of assumed objectivity that we once only allowed in the realm of theology and from the pulpit.

Letting the domination systems of "the world" off the hook, we put almost all our moral concern on greedy or ambitious individuals. We tried to change them without recognizing that each isolated individual was on bended knee before the powers and principalities of the market and more. In most nations today, our moral compass has been thrown off its foundations.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *What Do We Do with Evil?* (CAC Publishing: 2019), 48-51; and *What Do We Do with Money?*, unpublished notes, 2020.

Fr. Jack