

JMJ CHS

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Vineyard. Safe Haven Sunday.

The theme of today's readings is very clear. It's The Vineyard. In Israel, *The Chosen People* are considered God's vineyard. The responsorial psalm tells us that a vine was brought out of Egypt to be planted in a new location, the promised land.

Vineyards are good things. They are called upon to produce the fruit of the vine. Good fruit that can be used to make wine. And wine is a good thing as well. For most people, used in moderation, it can indeed be seen as a gift from God. Something that can lift one's spirits a bit. And that's not a bad thing. If you think it is, then please remember that Jesus's first miracle, at the marriage feast of Cana, was to make wine. And a very good vintage. But, we need to be careful. Too much vino can lead to big problems.

But, God inspires Isaiah, the author of the first reading, to use a physical vine to represent the symbolic one. And his judgment is critical. He complains that his vineyard is only producing wild grapes. Unsuitable for consumption. This refers to the behavior of His Chosen People. They have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. So God tore down its hedge and abandoned his own vineyard.

And then in the gospel, Jesus says that the Vineyard will be handed over to others who will produce good fruit in the proper season. In case it's not clear, Christianity is that new vineyard. However, we risk losing it ourselves. Are we doing any better than our spiritual ancestors, the Jews, when it comes to taking care of the vineyard and producing good fruit? Again, we had better be careful.

I told you last week that this Sunday is designated as *Safe Haven Sunday*. This initiative had its origins with our Catholic bishops about ten years ago, when they published a letter designed to deal with the threats posed of in our lives in this generation by different types of media. And so today our American pastors are called upon to address this very sticky subject.

This type of "art" has been around for a long time. There are depictions out there from the various cultures down through the ages. In our times in America, up until recently, it was very difficult to find a picture, or a magazine, much less a video. And then of course came the 60's and the sexual revolution and people like Hugh Hefner whose philosophy abandoned reason and common sense, and dismissed biblical teachings. The idea of the body as *The Temple of the Holy Spirit* has been dismissed as we have now opened *Pandora's Box* and the evil escaped out into our culture with devastating results.

Addictive drugs and alcohol enter the human body by different pathways. Through needles into our veins, up our nostrils, or into our mouths. Images on the other hand, enter by with the eyes with a direct connection to the heart and the soul of an individual. And weren't we always taught to exercise self discipline and keep custody of our eyes.

As I mentioned last week, there was some talk at the Priest convocation about the science behind all of this. They spoke about the mechanics of how this addiction works. It has something to do with dopamine, a drug within our body that gets released into our brain potentially causing an addiction. And all addictions of course are like a two-sided coin. On the one hand it is pleasurable, but on the other hand the conscience tells you it is dangerous. It is costly, and destructive of the self, but potentially on the family, and ultimately on the culture. All addictions are problems, and this addiction is no different.

And it's not rare anymore. Not by a long shot. We all know that it's only a button push away on our devices. And sometimes it shows up uninvited. And it's not too hard to imagine that this is an entry point for the addictions of a lot of very young people. Boys and girls alike. Our kids today have computers and cell phones and of course the purveyors take advantage of it. They are creating a market. They are directing their advertising and marketing strategies in such a way as to hook the young people when they are young and vulnerable. They want to hook these kids for life. Just follow the money.

It is indeed now one of the largest industries in the world, and making tons of money for those few who are at the top of the pyramid. And it's not too hard to conclude that this has been one of the more extravagant and successful projects to come out of hell. Imagine the CEO, Satan, and his minions, sitting around a conference table down in the lower levels, planning for the future. The conversation might go something like this.

Satan asks his staff,

"How can we get back at God for kicking us out of heaven."

Someone answers, " what do you think about this? What if we focus on his greatest treasure, His family."

"And how might we do that?"

"Well, and this is key, how about if we destroy the fathers in the family? And, wouldn't it make sense to start at a young age?"

"But of course. We'll target the young people. And to better facilitate our goal, let's invent a portable phone and let's paint a little trademark on it."

"A trademark? What do you have in mind?"

"How about an apple? With a bite taken out of it."

And Satan replies, "By George, I think we've got it! Now let's get to work."

Yes, St. Paul reminded us that it is spiritual warfare. "Our battle is not with flesh and blood, but principalities and dominions, and the powers of this present darkness."

So, what are we to do? Well, at the conference Fr. Sean gave us a suggestion as to how we might approach our Homilies this weekend on this *Safe Haven Sunday*. He noted that in

the readings, the vineyards were surrounded by a hedge, or a fence. Fences are there to protect what's on the inside, namely, the Vineyard. Well, we are that Vineyard, that is our families, and we need a hedge, or wall to protect us from the predators and wiles of the enemy.

What kind of hedge or fence are we talking about.? Well, I think to some extent Safe Haven Sunday was facilitated by a support group called *Covenant Eyes*(.com). I checked them out, and they have a lot of great ideas for all of us, whether we suffer from the problem ourselves, or whether we are trying to protect our families or our congregations from it.

Other examples of "hedges". When a person comes to me in the confessional with this issue, it's often apparent that they are struggling with an addiction. I always ask them what they are proactively doing to overcome it. All too often, the answer is just confession. Well, that's a good starting point, we do in fact, believe that there are graces to be had, but I do believe that God also wants us to also take advantage of all the tools available out there on behalf of the sinner. Utilizing the Covenant Eyes program would certainly be another option. I also suggest the help of a virgin martyr. St. Maria Goretti would be a good one. Did you know that she was murdered by a young man who was addicted to those images? But that was back around 1900. You can imagine how tame those images were at that time compared to what they are now.

Yes, and boys have come to me in the confessional crying about this addiction. They're very upset with themselves. But they can't help it. They were exposed at a young age to an addictive behavior, and now they're stuck. The road back to normalcy will not be easy.

Parents, think of all the many ways that you have already built a hedge or a fence around your family. You make the children wear helmets when they go out biking. You tell them to not talk to strangers. You get all those vaccinations. You make them dress warmly, whenever they go outside in the winter. You cook healthy meals for them at home. You feed them vitamins. Maybe you are even particular about what movies they watch on TV. But the Internet is the way that most people of this generation have learned or have been exposed to images and ideas that are dangerous.

So, parents, as difficult as it may be, you have to be very proactive in putting up hedges around the Internet as well. It can be done, but it requires effort on your part and diligence. But, counsel your children as you do it. Encourage them to be wise and wary, and conscious of that *devil that roams the world like a roaring lion, looking for souls to devour*. Call them to not open that Pandora's box.

We do that here at the Holy Spirit school Masses and in their classrooms. We are always preaching wisdom, that very special type of smartness, or knowledge. As the Bible says, the beginning of wisdom, only the beginning of wisdom, is the fear of the Lord.

~Fr. John