

## “THE GENTLE SLOPE, SOFT UNDERFOOT” THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Like many of you, I recall some awfully clever cartoons from my youth that **taught solid morality**, doing so in a humorous way. When a character was torn between good and evil (e.g. Tom and Jerry, Donald Duck). I especially enjoyed seeing a devil land on one shoulder and whisper in his ear, while an angel danced on the other. **Good** always seemed to **triumph** over evil. But the devil is **much more** than a **cartoon** character dancing on a shoulder. Like many Catholics, I was taken aback by the interview of the Jesuit Superior General, **Father Arturo Sosa**, offered to an Italian magazine. He was in Rimini, Italy for a conference sponsored by **Communion and Liberation**. The Jesuits are the world’s largest men’s religious Order, with some 16,000 members, and Argentinian Fr. Sosa is their world-wide elected leader.

In the midst of the interview, Sosa was asked a straightforward question: “Father Sosa, **does the devil exist?**” His complete answer follows: “In different ways. We need to understand the cultural elements to refer to this figure. In the language of Saint Ignatius it is the bad spirit that leads you to do things that go against the spirit of God. It exists as the evil personified in different structures but not in people, *because it is not a person, it is a way of actuating evil. He is not a person like a human person.* It is a way for evil to be present in human life. Good and evil are in a permanent struggle in human consciousness [conscience], and we have ways to show them. We recognize God as good, entirely good. Symbols are part of reality, and *the devil exists as a symbolic reality, not as a personal reality.*” (my emphasis in *italics*) To be blunt, taken at face value Fr. Sosa’s words are quite **simply heretical**. Not surprisingly, his interview completely dominated coverage of the annual CL meeting for Friendship amongst Peoples.

For a man armed with a licentiate in philosophy and a doctorate in political science, he most certainly **ought to know better**. Nor is it the first time he has opined on this topic, which may explain the question in the first place. In 2017, he remarked “we have formed symbolic figures such as the devil to express evil.” His spokesman clarified (i.e. damage control) those remarks, stating “like all Catholics, Fr. Sosa professes and teaches what the Church professes and teaches. He does not hold a set of beliefs separate from what is contained in the doctrine of the Catholic Church.” If this is true (and I hope it is), Fr. Sosa must clarify his most recent remarks. For if reported accurately, what he expressed most certainly **does not conform** to the church’s doctrine. So, why are his words so dangerous?

Increasingly, people dismiss the Bible as a collection of time-conditioned stories, often useful, but certainly not seen as teaching “solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.” (Dei Verbum, #11). Similarly, people question the reality of hell and it is **not a stretch** to suggest that if the Devil is a symbolic reality, then hell is merely a symbolic state of being. Wouldn’t it flow logically? Catholic teaching was summarized in the Confession of Faith of the **Fourth Lateran Council** (1215 A.D.), wherein the Church proclaimed infallibly: “We firmly believe and openly confess that there is only one true God ... who by his almighty power at the beginning of time created from nothing both spiritual and corporeal creatures, that is to say angelic and earthly, and then created human beings composed as it were of both spirit and body in common. The devil and other demons were created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing. Man, however, sinned at the prompting of the devil.”

This is neither about seeing the devil lurking around every corner, nor entertaining a macabre fascination with evil—far from it. But in surveying the moral landscape, it is impossible to ignore the influence of the devil upon society. The devil is wily, cunning and clearly smarter than us. In his 1942 masterpiece *The Screwtape Letters* **C. S. Lewis** (who died on 22 Nov. 1963, the same day as President Kennedy) wrote: “Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the **gentle slope, soft underfoot**, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts... Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape.” He will try to draw us into our worst instincts, causing us to question our resolve against evil, gently yet steadily encouraging us to give in. Lewis even admitted how exhausting it was to write these letters (it still sells 100,000+ copies per year!): “At the time, I was thinking of objections to the Christian life, and decided to put them into the form, ‘That’s what the devil would say.’ But

making goods ‘bad’ and bads ‘good’ gets to be fatiguing.” Indeed, this devil stuff is serious business!

Each fall, my prayer is most especially directed towards our first-year college students. They face enormous pressures and the choices they make during the first year away from home often produce lifelong effects. They are tasting freedom for the first time and need to confront complex situations, engaging them with the eyes of faith. In the blink of an eye, their world has suddenly become much larger and they need a context with which to evaluate their myriad challenges. They are particularly susceptible to the errors the devil perpetrates, especially a **misguided notion of freedom**. The devil is **no match** for the power and glory of the Lord. But if we dabble in denying the personal reality of the devil, all bets are off.

- As you can see, the **three windows** over the Dayton Ave. confessionals are off for restoration and should be completed by the end of the month. The twelve Shrines of Nations windows have all been restored. My deepest gratitude to the Cathedral Heritage Foundation– this was the sponsored project for the CHF **Festival of Lights**. This year’s Festival (October 3) will focus on needed restoration to the 95-year-old sacristy original tile floor and marble. See the bulletin for more details. See page 7 of the bulletin for more information.
- Following the 10:00 a.m. Mass on September 15, a **new exhibit** dedicated to the immigrants who settled here and contributed to building our Cathedral debuts in our Museum. It highlights the history and building of the Shrines of the Nations.
- On September 6, 1901, an anarchist from Detroit entered a receiving line in Buffalo, NY with a revolver tucked under a handkerchief, assassinating President William McKinley. This led to the request for **full-time Secret Service** protection for all U.S. Presidents. Today, the Secret Service employs 3,200 special agents, each selflessly at the service of the Presidency and our nation. May we be grateful for these brave men and women.
- Work is good for the mind, body and soul. Consider how you react immediately upon awaking on Mondays. A positive attitude in those initial moments is crucial for how you see your week ahead.
- Without planning it, I spent a half-day at the State Fair **and didn’t spend a dime**. I had received a ticket *gratis*, found on-street parking, and stumbled across various food tastings. I had a great time! Still, I’ll never try it again!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector