

CHS

In the famous trilogy, Lord of the Rings, there is a character named Denethor, Steward of Gondor. Denethor is a man of strong character, wisdom, and nobility in governing his realm. But in the end, Denethor, loses all hope and places himself on a pyre to be burned up, just as the greatest battle for his people is about to occur. It is an image of complete despair. There is something very frightening when someone who was so strong fails so miserably. When someone so high falls so low.

There is something similarly alarming about the Gospel today. Jesus speaking to the chief priests and elders tells this parable about the landowner and his tenants. At the end of the parable, these noble and wise men pronounce the correct judgement: “He should put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times.” What is frightening is that these wise men, who have studied the Torah their whole life, who have lived a life of prayer and study, when it comes to the pivotal moment of their life and of their whole people, fail miserably, and reject the stone that will become the new cornerstone. For all of their wisdom and proper judgement, they still get it wrong.

Or think of England in the 1500s when King Henry VIII declared himself the Head of the Church and forced Catholics to choose to renounce the Faith or forfeit their life -why is it that of all of the monasteries in England, only the Carthusians of London and a couple of others remained faithful.

Monasteries-full of men who had devoted their *entire* lives to prayer and penance and sacred study failed in the pivotal moment of their lives and the life of their country, while at the same time there were laymen, like St. Thomas More, a man who had been heavily involved with worldly affairs his whole life, serving as Lord Chancellor of all England, and close friend of the King, who would choose to lay down his life for the Faith while these pillars of devotion and prayer and study all failed?

To put this question another way: why does evil shake some men to the core to the point that they despair like Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, become confused like the chief priests and elders of Jesus' time, or betray the faith like so many monks in England did at the time of the English Reformation? While others like St. Thomas More or any number of the martyrs don't break / even in the face of certain death?

I suppose if I could give you the answer, we would know the secret of men's hearts – none of us knows for certain what we would do in the face of these kinds of onslaughts, we must never trust in ourselves to overcome evil but always ask for and trust in the grace of Christ to carry us in our moment of decision.

There **is** something though that the Word of God addresses today that I think is very pertinent especially given the events of earlier this week in our nation's life.

This lesson is probably best described in something like a parable in the back-story to Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, who I mentioned. The man who was so great and yet failed his people so thoroughly in the end because of despair.

Denethor, possessed something that few people possessed. He held one of the two known existing palantiri. The palantir was a glass ball that one could look into and see what was occurring in other parts far away, it also might show glimpses into the future. Now the problem is that Sauron, the dark lord, held a sway over the palantir in that they would only show what

he wanted them to show. So what they showed was true – it was happening or *would* happen, but the dark lord controlled what was seen. So the dark lord only showed mainly evil things – Denethor would look in and see other realms falling to the power of the dark lord. He would see future visions of the dark lord’s armies at the gates of Denethor’s city. He would see soldiers he loved being killed by the dark lord’s troops. In the end his concentration on all of this darkness sapped his confidence, his courage, and his strength to fight.

In this parable we would all say, well he shouldn’t have kept looking into the palantir. He shouldn’t have kept watching all of this evil and allowing himself to be drained of strength and will. In the fashion of Jesus, I might now say “You are that man.” How many of us have been glued this week to the palantir of our time, the 24-hour news channels and internet sites.

Constantly re-living the Las Vegas Shooting – again and again looking at how horrible people can be in this world. The news by its nature is going to normally show that which is evil, that which is going to get us stirred into a rage or a depression or anxious– this is news. It is news because the normal thing in life is for concerts to go on with thousands of people joyfully gathering to listen to music– there is nothing newsworthy about that because

it happens hundreds of times every day. News focuses on what is *not* ordinary but in our mind, because we are constantly seeing these things, we begin to think they are *the* normal. That evil is growing and growing, that most people in our nation can't be trusted and so on.

We're not meant to bury our heads in the sand, but really, how much more do we need to know than that a tragic event occurred, that a man shot many, many, innocent people, and that investigators are still trying to find a motive. After 10 minutes of news, does it really help us to keep spending hours watching, and becoming more fascinated with the evil, all the while, not realizing what it is doing to us internally.

Today, St. Paul in that letter to the Phillipians tells us, **“Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”**

On Wednesday, the Columbus Dispatch, took a break from focusing on the killer and looked to the victims. It told the story of fifteen victims. Stories

like that of Laurie Beaton who was at the concert with her husband Jack celebrating their 23rd wedding anniversary. She said she at first thought the noise they were hearing was firecrackers but then felt something graze her arm and realized what was happening – as the bullets were hitting near them her husband told her to get down and then he placed himself over her, told her he loved her, and took the bullets that would have hit her. **Greater love has no one, than to lay down their life...**

And fortunately, many of these stories are beginning to be told, and that is where our attention should be – to the heroism of the first responders, to the self-sacrificing generosity of people who stayed and took care of victims even as the bullets were still raining, to these noble and honorable and pure actions, not to the evil actions of one individual....

So often we spend our time getting our impressions of humanity from 24-hour news, or rants on Facebook, heck we can't even escape into Sunday afternoon football as diversion anymore. But this is not a real picture of humanity. If you want the real picture, spend some time with real people. (Come to the Oktoberfest tonight), have dinner with some family members

or friends, join a Bible Study or group and spend time with what is true, and good.

St. Paul says “Think on what is good”

The Word of God today invites us to look at what we are spending time thinking about? Is it noble? Is it excellent? Is it worthy of praise? If not, then move on from it. Don't let the real dark lord, channel your mind, and eyes, and ears to only the things that are bad, only the things that stir up the darkest emotions, for eventually they will reach the heart and corrupt it. Eventually fear and anger begin to corrupt the heart and the way we look at life, eventually we will find ourselves like Denethor – in the moment of decision, failing because the strength of our heart has escaped us.

Paradoxically the ones in this world who have done the most to confront and defeat evil have been those who gave evil the least thought. The Saints! The saints thought about Christ, and all that is good and true and noble. When they combated evil their thoughts were not on the evil, but on the good, the true, the beautiful that were lacking and then they brought it to the situation. Mother Teresa did not spend her hours ranting about how bad all

of us rich first world people are – she spent her time showing how beautiful *every* human person is, even the poorest of the poor and the unborn. She spent her time showing us how beautiful life is when it is lived for someone other than oneself. She and all of the saints spent their time in love with and focused on Jesus Christ, focused on the stone rejected by the builders that has become the Corner Stone...

the cornerstone upon which all the evil of this world is destined to be destroyed. Let us think on this!