

We have all had to confront evil at one time or another in our lives. To paraphrase another context, we may not know how to exactly define evil but we know it when we see it.

Vlad the Impaler (otherwise known as Dracula) was evil.

Darth Vader is evil.

The Italian Evil Eye or Mal Occhio is evil.

If you are a Chargers fan, the Oakland Raiders are evil.

But perhaps it's not as simple as that. For example, Evel Knievel was not evil.

And what about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – two aspects of the same person? Should we call Dr. Jekyll evil?

And when having to choose between two evils what should we do? Perhaps use the Mae West approach: Mae West said "When I find myself between two evils I always pick the one I never tried before."

As Catholics, we have a clear dictum for our behavior: Do Good and Avoid Evil.

But how DO we define evil. Sometimes, we may be off on the wrong track. If we startle a spider climbing on our clothes and it bites us we may respond by killing the spider because "it's evil." However, looking at the whole event through the dead spider's eyes, WE are the one who are evil.

We act as if something is good for us it must be a good thing; if it's not, it's evil. For health reasons, eating bacon is evil. Unless, or course, you were starving during the Second World War – then, bacon is good.

A pouring rain that ruins a farmer's crop is evil. In the next county it brings much needed rain to a dry area and is considered good.

We believe Vlad the Impaler was evil. But his reputation is more evil in Western Europe than it was in Romania. Evil is often defined through the eyes of the beholder.

Perhaps, we are guilty of the philosophy of Protagoras when he declared "Man is the measure of all things." Put simply, we often mistakenly reduce evil to what hurts or annoys us.

Evil is, of course, different than that. It is not purely subjective.

How can we know if something is evil? Perhaps there is a clue in Matthew, chapter 7 and in chapter 24. The Lord warns the disciples that there are those who would lead them astray -- false prophets. They appear good but are not -- they are wolves in sheep's clothing. And how are the disciples to discern who is who? BY THE FRUITS OF THE FALSE PROPHETS THEY WILL KNOW THEM...every good tree bears good fruit and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree never bears bad fruit and a bad tree never bears good fruit. By their fruit you shall know them.

A short term temptation that looks desirable (remember Eve in the Garden of Eden?) can have disastrous consequences in the long run. Bad fruit. Do you want to know if a relationship is good or bad? Look at what fruit it bears.

Goodness leads us to God. Evil takes us away from Him. When trying to make a decision as to whether something is good or evil it is the Holy Spirit, if we ask, who will guide us to see the potential fruits of our decisions.

But remember: the Oakland Raiders really are evil.