

As Lent comes to a close I thought I might give a personal reflection.

So I was trying to say my prayers a little more during Lent and was reading from the Liturgy of the Hours. As I was reading a psalm-prayer these words from the reading stuck out at me:

*“Lord, send your mercy and your truth to rescue us from the snares of the devil.”*

The snares of the devil.

My mind touched a memory of long ago. I was studying for my First Holy Communion at San Gabriel Mission Catechism classes taught by wonderful Dominican nuns. We were having a discussion of the devil and what to do about him.

I distinctly remember a little classmate guy with a cherubic grin who volunteered: “Sister; I carry some little rocks in my pocket. And I have a picture of the devil that I put in my backyard. Every time I think of something bad, instead of doing the bad thing I throw the little rocks at the picture of the devil.”

Not a bad idea, I thought.

But who is this devil AKA Satan?

Many words have been associated with Satan: Trickster, Slanderer; Tempter; Lord of the Flies; Deceiver; Accuser.

Allow me to give my view.

In my opinion, Satan is not just an abstraction or projection of the evil within us. He is a conscious spirit who attempts to work within us in order to turn us away from the Face of God.

He is, of course, the antithesis of who God is. It was Satan who rather than reflecting the Goodness of God wanted to be a god. He would like us to do the same.

As the antithesis of God, Satan's gifts are the opposite of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Whereas the Holy Spirit facilitates wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and the desire to bond with God, the gifts of Satan include foolishness, ignorance, poor judgment, cowardliness, ignorance, contempt, and separateness from God.

How is he able to do his work? Not really by tempting us to eat that candy that we gave up for Lent. It is much more subtle than that. Let us go back to his name. I think one of the best understandings of Satan comes from the original Hebrew word for Satan which means "to obstruct."

Let me quote from Matthew 16:21:

*Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*

*And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."*

*But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block for me."*

A stumbling block. A distraction from a goal. What an excellent description for Satan.

So you're going along and you get sick; or your car starts acting up; or you get mad at a foolish person. A bell should go off in your head. Maybe I'm on my way

to doing God's work. Maybe the devil is trying to distract me. What is it that God would like me to accomplish?

Satan not only wishes to obstruct our path, he would like us to obstruct the path of others rather than help others. He would wish us to be members of his mystical body rather than the mystical body of Christ.

Sometimes, and I'll be honest, sometimes I can almost feel the presence of the devil. It is at those times that I need antidotes for the devil. I'll tell you what helps me:

I try to say prayers every morning and every evening. It really helps.

Taking part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is particularly useful.

I will make the Sign of the Cross and say "Go back to hell, Satan." I know this sounds a little like a curse, but for me it works.

And, it doesn't hurt to carry a few little rocks in my pocket just in case.