Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

May 10, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“I did not come to condemn but to save the world” (John 12:47}.

Acts 12:24—13:5a; Jn 12: 44-50

I taught religion in two Catholic high schools long ago. Freshman students were sometimes told by their older siblings to ask me this question: "Can God make a rock bigger than he can lift?" It was meant to be a “stump the teacher” question. Because God is omnipotent, the notion he can both do and not do something is intriguing. This is the basis for the problem of Evil. It happens, so either God is a monster who allows it, or God can’t stop it and is therefore not God.

When terrible things happen like war or the death of an innocent child, people are hard pressed to pray to a God who allows this or is the the cause of their suffering, or they must face the question of why a good God allows evil to happen in the first place. Has God made a rock bigger than he can lift?

My own answer to the question is that there is something God cannot lift or move. It is the human heart, and therefore the real mystery of evil is human freedom. God created us to be free. God wants intimacy with us freely chosen, not automatic. If we can’t say no, our yes is meaningless. It is possible to see that much of the evil we abhor is caused by human negation of God’s intent for us to live fully and joyfully, caring for one another, the Earth and the common good. It is human beings who frustrate this, compete for resources, seek their own benefit and security over others and ignore the common good. How many of today's diseases are caused by poisoning our shared environment for profit and to create products of convenience

we all use?

The fourth Gospel proclaims the Good News of God’s gift of life, but it also preserves the ultimate choice of every individual to reject this gift. God’s unconditional love and mercy cannot penetrate the stony heart or save anyone against their will. If we cannot say "No" to God, of what value is our "Yes"?

In today’s passage, Jesus gets to the point: “Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: It is the word that I spoke that will condemn him on the last day” (John 12:48). Jesus does not condemn us. We alienate and condemn ourselves by rejecting his word, for he and God are one. Jesus does not prevent us from doing evil, even if his grace does everything possible to dissuade us up to our last, free breath.

Martin Scorsese’s film “The Irishman,” explores the perversity of evil in the main character, a professional hitman who uses his friendship to lure Jimmy Hoffa to his death by assassination. Even when dying with the ministry of a priest, he cannot hold himself accountable. Everything “is what it is.” He has destroyed himself but cannot awaken his dead conscience to seek forgiveness.

This is a haunting theme in many “gangster” films like Coppola’s “The Godfather,“ a period drama and also a parable of the fate of nations that use violence to protect their own interests, then deny, forget and hold no one responsible for the outcome. They carry death in the heart of their histories.

God must have known that giving human beings freedom made us responsible for the world we would create by our own actions. We bear in ourselves the stone God cannot move or lift without our consent. This makes life vastly more interesting than a passive journey driven by fate or a melodrama with a happy ending no matter what. Jesus came to give us abundant life. In the short span we have on this earth, we are full partners in our own stories and how we find and promote that life for ourselve and others.

Advertisement