



## *Reflection from Fr. Garry Richmeier*

There is an image deeply rooted in our collective psyche regarding how this reality of ours works. We almost automatically see our world as a battle between good and evil. This image is well entrenched in most religions, often depicted as a contest between God and the devil. A perfect example of this in Catholicism is the prayer to Michael the Archangel, where we implore him to battle Satan for us and cast him back into hell. In this cosmic world-view, we are called to battle on the side of the "good," resisting and destroying whatever and whoever is "bad." "Onward Christian Soldiers" is a beloved Christian hymn and rallying cry in this regard. This requires us to identify who/what is good and who/what is bad, so that we know who/what we are fighting against. So when Ronald Reagan called Russia the "evil empire," it was clear to many that fighting the evil was our duty. Or when our last president called migrants crossing our southern border murders and rapists (evil), he was trying to do the same thing. We do the same thing within ourselves also. We identify the bad things (sin, weakness, faults, etc.), and then fight them or try to get rid of them. In this view of cosmic battle, there is very little that is neutral. Most everything is either good or bad, black or white. And while we're battling, we have little time or energy for anything/anyone else.

The trouble with accepting the world-view that everything is a battle between good and evil is that we doom ourselves to everlasting battle, conflict, and violence. Our human history of war, with the situations in Israel and Ukraine as simply the most recent examples, shows how attached we are to the good vs. evil idea. Congress dooms itself to impotence because of the adversarial relationship between the political parties, as each battles the evil "other." Individually we doom ourselves to a life of shame, guilt, and incrimination as we battle against our weaknesses which we can never get rid of because they are parts of us. As a society we doom ourselves to never ending racial conflict as we demonize each other.

We don't have to doom ourselves to a life of never-ending fighting/battle. Evil will remain with us whether we battle it or not. We might as well do something different that has a better chance of reducing the evil we tend to battle. That involves cultivating a world-view that is not adversarial, but is collegial. We work at seeing our purpose, not as Christian soldiers, but as creators of unity and cooperation. Our main goal then is not to destroy something, but to create and build something. We look for what will unite us so that together we will be strong enough to withstand and deal with the evil when it happens. Recognizing and promoting the good in ourselves and in others (rather than fighting the evil) invites the good in ourselves and others to come forward even more. This can be called building the Reign of God, which simply battling evil will never accomplish.

Hanging on the cross, Jesus said "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." This may be his greatest teaching regarding promoting the good (e.g. forgiveness) rather than battling evil..

*Peace,*

*Fr. Garry*