February 01, 2015
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Jesus is my hero”
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**Gospel: Mark 1:21-28**
Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

**HOMILY**
How would YOU define YOURself, who YOU are? Do you see yourself following the example of someone else, like a hero? Just about every person has heroes in his or her life, maybe even from an early age. As a child, your hero could be a parent, teacher, movie or TV character, maybe even a sports figure. For example, how many children, or very big children, might walk around this evening during the Super Bowl with a football shirt that has Brady’s name and number 12? During soccer season, I’ll bet the number 20 is often displayed, and quite proudly, because of Abby’s local fan base. In a way, the child might pretend to be their hero, they may emulate their hero in their actions. Some may even define themselves by their heroes. My wife and I finally saw a bit of Spiderman 2 the other evening, and noticed that, when Spiderman was apparently missing at a critical point in the movie, a small boy put on a child’s costume of the superhero and was going to take his hero’s place in confronting a villain. ….. We like to have heroes. As we grow into adults, we still have heroes, don’t we. There might still be a sports hero in the list, or a relative, friend, community leader, or maybe even a fictional character from a book, or one from a combination of characteristics we see and admire in various people. Thinking back to my original question – do you see your hero anywhere in how you define yourself?

It was just a few short weeks ago that parts of Paris were under siege, especially the building that housed the French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo. There was an immediate and widespread outpouring of sympathy for those affected by the violence, together with a condemnation of the terrorist acts, particularly in the West. However, what happened after that was very, very amazing. Within a few days, a movement, a new battlecry, began – “Je suis Charlie.” Wikipedia notes that “the slogan had become one of the most popular news hashtags in Twitter history. Je suis Charlie was embraced worldwide, was used in music, displayed in print and animated cartoons (including The Simpsons), and became the new name of a town square in France.” It may have been intended to identify a supporter with victims of the terrorist act, “and by extension, a supporter of freedom of speech and resistance to armed threats.” But many saw it as a battlecry to seemingly defend complete freedom of speech and of the press. At the Golden Globe awards just a few days after the attack, a few movie stars uttered the
phrase from the stage, and the packed Hollywood audience gave a standing ovation, wildly cheering and applauding. The President of France declared the attack to be one on the “very identity” of France and an estimated 2 to 4 million people took to the streets in that country, declaring … *Je suis Charlie.*

But, hold on! Just a minute, please. *Je ne suis pas Charlie.* I am NOT Charlie. Charlie Hebdo is NOT my hero.

Certainly, the French people, and everyone else, were entitled to be righteously upset by the terrorist events. But, the march effectively ignored the 10% of the French population who are Muslim and who were deeply offended by the magazine’s depiction of Mohammed. The march ignored, and in some respects celebrated, the magazine’s very irreverent attitude towards politics and religion, and in particular, towards Muslims, Jews, and yes, even Catholics. A week or so after that outpouring on the streets, in Hollywood and in many other places, Pope Francis noted that there are limits and that “you can’t make a toy out of the religions of others.” He totally defended freedom of speech and expression as not only a fundamental human right but a duty to speak one’s mind for the sake of the common good “without offending.” But, the pope added, “It’s normal, you cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others. There is a limit. Every religion has its dignity. There are so many people who speak badly about religions or other religions, who make fun of them, who make a game out of the religions of others. They are provocateurs.” A lot of words there, but did you catch certain phrases? The pope said there are limits to total freedom of speech and expression – in effect, one can’t just say or do whatever one wants to, one must be responsible for one’s actions. And, we have a duty, read that: a responsibility, to speak one’s mind for the sake of the common good “without offending.” But, you say, this is America, to speak one’s mind for the sake of the common good “without offending.” But, you say, this is America, and we are free to say and do whatever we want! Archbishop Sheen said that license is being able to do anything you want! True freedom is being able to do what we ought to do – what is right (in the eyes of God). With total freedom comes responsibility. And now, a few weeks after the movement and battlecry began, more and more are saying that the phrase is actually dividing people, not unifying them.

I am not Charlie. Charlie Hebdo is NOT my hero. I am Christian. Jesus is my hero, and I will try to be more Christ-like.

In today’s Gospel reading, Mark introduces Jesus’ first public action of His ministry, and refers to Jesus’ teaching 4 times: “Jesus entered the synagogue and taught”; “the people were astonished at His teaching”; “for He taught them as one having authority”; and, “a new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.” Jesus taught others by His words and His actions, both highlighted in today’s reading. He taught about the Kingdom of God, about God’s love and mercy available to all, and He was teaching differently than the scribes. He taught with authority, authority from His Heavenly Father, and the people listened. They were paying attention so much that an unclean spirit, resident in one of the listeners, felt threatened and cried out, “What have you to do with US, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy US?” In effect, “have you come to destroy evil?” And the answer from Jesus, a resounding “*YES,*” through His words and His actions! The unclean spirit convulsed the man and left him. Jesus, as always, won the battle. As always, when confronting evil, Jesus wins the battle.
Whether the battle is personal, within ourselves … or external, in the outside world … if Jesus confronts evil, if we allow Jesus to confront evil through us, Jesus wins the battle. As Catholic Christians, as disciples of Christ, as members of the Body of Christ, as the hands, feet, eyes and mouth of Christ in the world today, we are encouraged … we are called, we are held responsible, to be more Christ-like. We are called to identify evil in our world, and then, through prayer and support, to confront it in Christ’s name.

There is evil in our world. How do we identify it? How do we know what is good and what is genuinely evil? In our 1st reading, Moses tells the people that God will put His words into the mouth of His prophet. The teachings of Jesus, the Son of God, the great prophet, are the words from God – Jesus is the Word of God. The teachings of the Church, handed down through the centuries from Jesus and the early Church leaders, are summarized in our Catechism. If you don’t have a copy, please get one. Last evening, we had this year’s candidates for Confirmation here, as they began their preparation to receive the sacrament. When confirmed, they will receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, as many of us did, that will help them, through fervent prayer, to recognize and confront the evils, the demons, of our day, and to help themselves and others enjoy the peace, love and mercy that God does make available to each of us.

How do we confront evil, after recognizing it? How can we help ourselves and others to have a life of peace, true freedom, love and hope? Pope Francis says that we have a duty to speak one’s mind for the sake of the common good “without offending.” As followers of Christ, we can express that, through words and through actions, in positive ways, as He did. A few examples … How many of those applauding at that awards ceremony did so because every one else did – think about that. Also, a little over a week ago, some members of our Youth Group went to Washington, DC, to join hundreds of thousands of others, young and old, from around the nation in the annual March for Life, a very positive outpouring of support for the respect of ALL life, from conception to natural death. From the pictures I saw on-line, this nation has a very positive, pro-life generation that has been forming. You really need to check those pictures out and see for yourselves. And, a fellow recently approached me at the church entrance and explained that he was so upset at an article defending abortion in the paper, written by a noted leader of a women’s organization, that he was going to write a reply. Good for him, I hope he did do it, after prayerful reflection!! As an on-going example of recognizing evil, and confronting it through prayer and example, please check out the banners at the rear of the church after Mass today, which our Consistent Life Ethic team is promoting over these five weeks before Lent begins. We confront violence, capital punishment, euthanasia, abortion and poverty, five major evils in today’s world, by prayer and by celebrating the sacraments that Christ and the Church provide for us, to show God’s total love and mercy for each of us. Finally, next weekend is Public Policy Weekend, and our Diocesan focus this year is on the 9 positive tenets of New York State’s Women’s Equality Act, and why our legislators should consider passing an amended act that focus on these positive measures. We ask that you check out the tables next weekend in the Narthex and sign your name.

With total freedom comes responsibility. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us is called to be more like Jesus. Jesus is my hero. Is He your hero?