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Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer – "And deliver us from evil."
John 10:22-30

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A French artist and designer based in Marseille is getting people's attention. They've created a communication campaign designed to shock and alarm regular folks in everyday places. You could be going through a subway station, or walking down a sidewalk, or just driving around minding your own business, when all of a sudden you're confronted with a startling message. According to the artist, known only as Parse/Error, the purpose of this campaign is to mix "the codes of advertising and the clichés of the end-of-the-world annunciators with a good dose of [dark] humor. Ironical, offbeat and striking, this series of . . . posters makes us challenge our certainties and forces us to look with honesty at our way of life and consuming habits." The posters are simple, clean, and white—the only design is a handful of big bold words emblazoned across the paper.

Here are a few examples of the types of messages:

BE YOURSELF, BE UNIQUE, FIND YOUR STYLE, BUY MY PRODUCT. YOU WILL DIE ANYWAY.

OUR BRAND MIGHT NOT BE ETHICAL, BUT WE BOTH KNOW YOU'LL STILL BUY IT. WE'RE SCREWED ANYWAY, SO WHY NOT?

BUY MORE STUFF. BUY MORE STUFF. BUY MORE STUFF. BUY MORE STUFF. THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD.

And while the signs are designed to be pessimistic, that's not their ultimate purpose—rather they're to create a better future. The artist's intention is to wake people up, get them to change their lives for the best, achieve their goals and make the most of their resources.

But what I liked best about this campaign is how it points out that evil isn't obvious. We've come to believe that we can pick evil out of a crowd. It's got horns and a pointy tail. It holds a pitchfork. Its color is red. It does bad things. And it always comes complete with fiery flames. However, that's not the kind of evil I've ever seen. The Bible teaches us that evil is in the everyday, the ordinary, the normal. It's what we've grown accustomed to—made us apathetic, desensitized, numb. And that's what makes evil so sinister, it's where we least expect it. But be on your guard, because evil is subtle. It can sound good, look like a solution, masquerade as beautiful, have good intentions, promise the world. In fact, it can even feel right, and even make the right feel wrong.

For example, think of "the economy." We've been taught to believe that there's some autonomous, freestanding reality called "the economy." It determines our lives, decides if we should be glad or sad, and demands our most frantic efforts and fervent dedication. "Wall Street has decided" we sometimes hear. But just think of the evils committed because of "the economy"!

Or "the media" is another one. It appears good—after all, we need information, don't we? From morning till night, "the media" feeds us images, facts, names, sights and sounds that determine how we see things and what we believe about the future. "The media" offers to tell us what's going on in the world, what is and what is not. We call it "news." But can you think of anything in our time that's been more divisive?

Or how about death? I mean, that's obviously evil, right? Not anymore. We've airbrushed it, sterilized it, normalized it to the point that it's just a part of life. From an early age, Disney's *Lion King* brainwashes our children to believe it's just the "Circle of Life." The spider in *Charlotte's Web* says, "What's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die", as if it's no big deal. And ever notice how we don't call it a funeral anymore? That's too sad and depressing, right? So, we call it a "celebration of life!" But when death isn't taken seriously, then neither is the Gospel.

So, if Parse/Error did your own personal ad campaign pointing out the subtle evils in your life, what would it look like? Maybe you don't even need a campaign to point it out to you. After all, what keeps you up at night? What are you running away from? What haunts your dreams? What do you have lurking in the shadows? What's turned your life into a living hell?

Whatever it is, it probably seemed okay at the time, was innocent enough, didn't look like it would hurt you—maybe you even thought it was the best thing, the right thing even. But now that you've figured it out, unmasked it, seen evil for what it really is, you wonder if it's not too late. It's got a hold of you now—constricting you, squeezing you, crushing you—and it won't let go. And after being caught in evil's grip long enough, you might've learned some coping techniques. You might've resigned yourself to just deal with it. Learned how to tune it out. Or maybe you got busy distracting yourself with other things. But at the end of the day, when you're left alone with it, evil can still seem daunting, a hopeless struggle to ever break free. Like, our prayer, "But deliver us from evil" has fallen on deaf ears. Everywhere we look, we don't find any answer from God—we just feel evil's grip tighten around us. And if that's how it feels sometimes, if that's how you feel right now, then here's a word of advice: look down. . . .

That tight hold that you're feeling, isn't evil. No, it's the strong saving grasp of your Savior. You see, it's true that while you were once lost to evil, destined for darkness, subjugated by Satan—that's not you anymore. No, you have been marked by Baptism as God's own. He has stamped His name on you, claimed you as His, made you a child of God. You are set apart for redemption, bought at a price with the most precious blood of your Lord Jesus Christ. And now He holds you in His saving arms.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus renewed this promise to you. He said of His flock, of His Church, of *you*, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." The forces of evil, what Luther calls the "Unholy Trinity"—sin, death, and the devil—they might try to get their mitts on us, but it's no use. At best, they might brush against our pinky toe if it sticks out, but you and I are safe in God's hands. His are the hands that made evil come untrue by restoring sight to the blind, blessing the little children, even reaching down into death and pulling out a widow's son. His are the hands that were hammered to a cross, shattering our every demon and smashing their might. His are the hands that rolled away the stone, reaching out to all creation with the light of life. His are the hands that have answered our prayers, "But deliver us from evil." Come what may, we are kept safe in His hands.

I love the newest attraction in Vietnam. It's called the Golden Bridge—there are a couple pictures in your bulletin. Over three thousand feet above sea level, the pedestrian walkway extends from the edge of a leafy cliff face high above the treetops. From what people are saying, it offers tourists a breathtaking view of the majestic landscape below. "I feel like I'm walking on clouds," said one tourist. "It's so unique." But the best part of the bridge are the two colossal hands that seem to be holding the bridge itself, and lifting the people on high. Apparently, the bridge was designed to evoke the image of "the giant hands of God." What a beautiful reminder of how underneath us are our Lord's everlasting arms—supporting us, guarding us, drawing us close to the very heart of God. While it's true you and I, we might not know what the future holds, but we do know *who* holds the future.