



In 1973, the movie *The Exorcist* was released to much acclaim, box office success, many scary nightmares for viewers, and lots of people speaking to their parish priests, questioning the reality of demonic possession. As you probably know, the movie was based on a true case of a 14-year-old boy in the Washington area. That the movie was based on a well-written novel with the same title as the movie and was written by William Peter Blatty. There was one scene that has stayed with me, although I am not sure if it was in the movie or just in the book. It is as the conclusion of the movie and all the drama has ended. The little girl Regan is free from what haunted her, the two priests who prayed over her are dead, and the family is selling the house and moving away. A Jesuit priest, who was a close friend of Father Karras who died during the exorcism, asks the non-believing mother of the little girl, if she now believes in God. She responds, *I am not sure if I believe in God but I sure believe in Satan and evil.*

Whether you believe in a demonic figure named Satan or not, it is all but impossible to deny the power and reality of evil in the world. Once again, we saw this so clearly in the demonic acts of Stephen Paddock this past Sunday Night. The results of his actions are staggering: 58 people killed, more than 500 wounded, a city and nation overwhelmed in grief and fear. I think such large numbers make it hard to focus on the individual grief of so many. We can lose sight of the parents, spouses, children who cast into mourning. They have had their lives changed forever. People with whom they shared life and love with are gone and hole is ripped in the heart of thousand that will ripple down for generations. Young girls who will someday be brides will have no father to walk them down the aisle. Spouses who looked forward to growing old together are alone. Little boys will not have a father to share a catch with or speak about a football game. Paddock brought us pure unadulterated evil into the world. And, up until this point, we are haunted by not having any sense why this seemingly normal, rather wealthy man with a girlfriend and successful career would do such a thing. Our hearts cry out for some insight, some understanding what led him to rent rooms on the 32nd floor with armed with killing weapons.

I am not in any way suggesting that it was Satan that led Paddock to buy the guns, rent the room, carefully plan the attack and then pull the trigger. Paddock is the one responsible and now stand before the judgment seat of God. After every one of these too often acts of violence there is a cry for gun control. There is powerful desire to blame someone, some industry, some politicians. We want to hold someone accountable and that is correct. As I have spoken and written before to you, I have no interest in guns and have never owned one. I do believe that we need to have good laws that keep the guns out of the hands of people who should not have them. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that.

Still, it frustrates me that there is almost no cry to look deeper into such acts of evil beyond the control of weapons. Why do people in our society chose to break the most fundamental of all human and divine law: *Thou shalt not kill*. When Cane killed Abel, and God asked him where his brother was, he responded, *Am I my brother's keeper*. Certainly, the sense of family life, respect and civility for one another even as we disagree on issues, the disposability of life, be it in the womb or an elderly dying person, whenever it calls for sacrifice or inconvenience are issues as well worth pondering as much as looking at gun control. In an increasing secular society, is anyone responsible to a higher law than that of following his or her own will? For a long time, a great many people in the world, including our own wonderful nation, do not take God seriously, with many denying his very existence.

We heard such a theme twice in our readings today. Centuries before Christ was born, the chosen people so often rejected God and great suffering occurred. Do not think of God as the one who sent the suffering. We humans do that to ourselves when we reject his plan for our happiness. The prophet describes that God wishes to give us a beautiful vineyard but we have turned into weeds. In the Gospel tells a parable about a landowner who rents out his land for vineyards. When it comes time to collect the rent, the tenants beat the men who come in the name of the owner. They even brutally kill his son. The allegory is clear: God keeps seeking to share his life with his people, even to the point of sending his son Jesus, and so often humanity rejects him and even destroys what he has given us.

So, the case for the reality of evil is easily proved. People often ask, in times of such horror, where is God. I know God was at the tragedy in Las Vegas. Still, we are always a people have hope in God and in the essential goodness of life with the trust that God's grace will always overcome evil. Here is glimpse of our compassionate God and his amazing grace in action:

In the midst of gunfire, chaos and carnage, Sonny Melton — a nurse from Tennessee — died shielding his wife from the bullets raining down on them. Mike Cronk, a retired teacher from Alaska, used his pickup truck as a makeshift ambulance to transport wounded concertgoers. And Mike McGarry, a financial adviser from Philadelphia, threw

himself on top of his kids as he heard hundreds of bullets ring out. White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders was on the verge of tears Monday as she recounted the heroes born out of the heartbreak. *“What these people did for each other says far more about who we are as Americans than the cowardly acts of a killer ever could,” Sanders said, fighting back tears during the daily news briefing.* The actions of ordinary people, young and old, parents and friends, doctors and nurses give show us love in action. Wherever there is love, there is God. As evil as was Stephen Paddock, the power of love confronted the wicked one face to face. Our hearts are broken. We weep again at another display of evil, but as a believer in Jesus Christ, we know that love is stronger than death. As Catholics, we know evil well, but we believe are more in the love of God. Love is stronger than death.