

Today's gospel follows Jesus' baptism. No sooner was the glory of the hour of the baptism over than there came the battle of the temptations. It was the Spirit who thrust Jesus out into the wilderness for the testing time. The very Spirit who came upon him at his baptism now drove him out for his test.

In this life it is impossible to escape the assault of temptation; but one thing is sure – temptations do not come our way to us to make us fall, but to strengthen our faith.

The temptations of Jesus did not originate in God (nor ours), but from the evil one. The gospel says that “Christ was in the desert among wild beasts, and angels ministered to him.” That is the classic struggle when the beasts and the angels within us confront each other.

Need we look any farther than what happened at that high school in Florida, Satan inspiring death and destruction into one who allowed it into his life to destroy our resolve, our faith in God?

It appears that the beasts and Satan continue to close in, wanting to overcome our faith with doubt and despair. I ask that in faith, we raise ourselves in defiance, because within our lives and beyond the darkness walks Jesus...proclaiming ever more for us to believe in the gospel and to know the Kingdom of God is always within our reach. His angels now minister to those kids.

The question is, how can we heed these words, living among the terrible beasts, assist people into knowing this? The answer is to be the gospel, to be the good news. To do the noble thing, no matter how small it might seem.

In doing so, the beasts are pushed back, and the reign of God is extended.

What I would like to do today is simple: To provide you with some examples of people being the Good News, people doing the noble thing and extending the Reign of God. (One story is rather mixed, as it allowed in the darkness and then pushed back.)

Some such stories can be of heroic proportions, like that coach who gave up his life for his students and others are very simple, but nonetheless crucial for God's Kingdom.

+I think of people arriving for the vespers service. One woman was directed to parallel park. Seeing her anxiety of having to do this, one of our facility guys, Daniel, parked it for her and in so doing pushed away her fear and Kingdom of God was extended in a small act of kindness.

+Another story involved a friend of mine. He told me how he sat down with his son and showed him a beautiful silver rosary that his aunt had given him when he was very young. He told his son that when he died, he would like his son to have the rosary and that when his time came close, he was in turn to give the rosary to a niece or nephew.

He only asked that in taking the rosary that the son was to pray for him and his aunt. In so doing, he was extending the chain of prayer through generations, and thereby extending the reign of God through time.

He told his son that when he was young he was very poor and had to work his way through college. Well, it happened that during one semester he did not have the money to stay in school.

His aunt then provided him with \$600 dollars (money went a long way back then) to keep him in school.

He said his aunt died before he could pay her back. He then gave a check for \$600 dollars, to St. Jude Parish, saying in effect, "St. Jude will pay her back in some form or another." That friend was my best friend, my father, while I was pastor at St. Jude. Love received, and love given to the Kingdom of God. And the beasts retreated.

+Our next story involves a young man named William, who grew up in Baltimore, MD in the 1960's. He grew up in an atheistic household, hating anything to do with religion. He and his mother became a gateway for the beasts to come in as he and his mother started a publication of an anti-God atheistic magazine.

In time, however, he began to see how empty his life had become, recognizing the fact that if life was to have meaning, we will need to rest our faith on something higher and nobler than ourselves.

Just before Christmas in 1979, he read a novel by Taylor Caldwell called, Dear & Glorious Physician. It was a story about a man named Lucanus, who lived in the Roman times and, like William, grew up hating anything to do with religion. However, the anger turned to love when he discovered Jesus and as the novel progressed he grows up and becomes St. Luke, the author of the Gospel according to Luke.

Finishing the book before going to bed he was awakened by a dream about the bible. He got out of bed and then went to an all-night discount bookstore and found a bible.

He stayed up the rest of the night reading St. Luke and there he found Jesus and the beasts were pushed back.

He then wrote a letter of apology to the Baltimore Sun, where he apologized for his part, along with his mother, Madelyn Murray O'Hair in the 1963 Supreme Court ruling that banned the bible and prayer from American Schools. Did it begin then with our schools?

+Our last story involves a West Virginia mine, where 12 miners perished from carbon monoxide poisoning. A miner by the name of Martin Toler found a scrap of paper and managed to scribble out a goodbye message to his family and with the following message he extended the reign of God into that mine and made it a gateway to heaven.

He wrote: "Tell all I'll see them on the other side. It wasn't so bad. I just went to sleep. I love you." On any scrap of paper they could find, others also wrote notes, concluding with, "I love you." Messages of faith and hope for that of heaven within the darkness of that mine.

Love is where God reigns and the beasts of this world retreat. What will we do with the time we have on this earth? What stories have yet to be written our lives to extend God's reign? What will it be? A legacy of love for the Kingdom of God or a place we might make more comfortable for the beasts to dwell?