

“There’s a monster under my bed!” Many have been the parents of a young child awakened in the middle of the night by this fearful cry. One parent I know always kept a container of “monster repellant” at the ready (a can of Lysol). Accompanying the child to the bedroom he would spray with the “repellant” both the room and especially under the bed to drive the monster away. Assured by Dad that the monster was gone, the child would get back into bed and sleep peacefully the rest of the night.

As adults we laugh at such childish fantasies. Yet, each year on the First Sunday of Lent we proclaim the story of Jesus’ encounter with the “monster” Satan in the desert. Older books of the Lives of the Saints are replete with similar accounts of encounters with the devil in which the saint literally got beaten up. Satan was forever lurking under a bed, in a basement, in a stairwell, or in some dark corner, just waiting to pounce. Like Jesus himself, these saints chose to go “head to head” with the Satan. In that fight they did not have a can of aerosol “monster repellant”, but a more powerful weapon, a simple one-line mantra uttered in the power of the Spirit of God—“Be gone, Satan!”

Who or what is Satan? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#s 391,395) states the traditional teaching of a fallen angel. Satan is every attribute and value contrary to our definition and experience of God. Satan is the prince of jealousy, bitterness, paranoia, obsession and lies. Few things in life torment us and beat us up as badly as these. They lurk in every dark corner, come out from under our beds at night, generally threaten us, darken our days, dampen our joys, and make us anxious as to what may lie around the corner, robbing us of outer and inner peace, leaving us feeling bruised and beaten up like the desert saints and Jesus himself.

What and where are some examples where, like Jesus and the saints of old, we encounter the “monster”; are harassed, or abused by Satan in our lives?

Every time our minds and hearts begin bitterly replaying harbored thoughts like a audio or video disk or an item saved on our computer hard drive, old conversations, old

wounds, old rejections, old injustices, so that everything inside of us wants to scream: “This isn’t fair!” “How dare she or he say or do that after all I’ve done for them!”: we are staring into the eyes of Satan.

Every time we feel pangs of jealousy (not necessarily overtly directed against someone else’s good fortune, though there’s enough of *that* to go around!) but in the disappointment we feel because our bodies, marriages, priesthood, careers, and even our morals haven’t turned out as perfectly as we’d have liked; whenever we find it hard to be grateful for our own lives, to count our blessings: we are being beaten up by Satan.

Any time we have trouble falling asleep at night because some memory, some disappointment, some lost love, some wrong-turn taken, some real or imagined guilt, some past sin forgiven by God but not forgotten by us, or some obsession won’t let go and give us enough calm to sleep: Satan is harassing us, right under or in *our* beds.

Satan is alive and well, still tormenting us. We call his presence: obsessions, heartaches, restlessness, jealousy, emptiness, fear, paranoia, old hurts, insomnia, chaos, and other names. In our fear we too cry for a “repellant.”

In Jesus God has provided us with a divine repellant. Jesus who confronted, was abused, but ultimately triumphed over Satan through the mystery of his cross and resurrection is the antidote into which we were immersed in baptism, his presence and victory renewed in every Mass, and made present in a personal way in the Sacrament of Penance. Lent is a time to avail ourselves of all that God our Father has given us in Jesus, with him stare down the monsters lurking under our beds, and in the power of their Spirit say: “Be gone, Satan!”