

Lent II – 2018 Resurrection, Ansonia

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

My friend Luis Santaella once lent me *Spartacus: The Complete First Season*. He was always talking about the show and how much he enjoyed it. Well – I watched it. Let me start by saying that the only resemblance to the 1960 movie with Kirk Douglas was that the main character's name is Spartacus and that he was a gladiator who led a slave revolt in the Roman Empire from 73 B.C. – 71 B.C. The Starz version appears to be little more than soft-porn with a lot of gruesome fights and murders and very little story line or character development.

What struck me most was the total decadence of this modern version. The producers portrayed the citizens of Capua as totally depraved and sexually immoral. My wife said she doesn't understand why producers feel they need to make such disgusting films and why people would pay to watch them.

The truth of the matter is that from a historical standpoint, the modern version is historically correct. Most of the ancient pagan religions considered sexual immorality as a part of their rites and ancient Roman culture had very few boundaries.

It is this type of sexual immorality that St. Paul is addressing in today's epistle to the Thessalonians. He is reminding them of the sanctity of the

body as the vessel for the Holy Spirit. He starts by reminding them how they ought to walk and act in such a way as will please God. That the body should be honored as created by God and should be sanctified in keeping with His holy purpose. Christians should have a personal passion for sexual purity that surpasses the passion that the world has for sexual experience. His first letter to the Thessalonians was written around 51 A.D., but it could be written just as well to us today.

The modern version of Spartacus couldn't have been made 50 years ago when the Kirk Douglas version was made. Back then, Hollywood had an office of Standards and Practices which tried to keep movies and television shows morally upright. It no longer exists. Today, the more outrageous, the more immoral, and the more decadent the film the better it is for the box office. It used to be that an "X" rating was the death knell for a film. Today it is the "G" rating. Producers and directors will add sexual or violent elements to stories to make sure it gets at least a "PG" rating but they would much prefer an "R" or, if it is for TV, it is either the "TV-14" or "TV-MA" rating they want. Sex sells. Decadence and immorality sells: goodness doesn't. Netflix has a Marvel Comics series called "Jessica Jones". Fortunately, Netflix is very quick to point out that this series is very dark and definitely not for children. It has a TV-MA rating but if it was a movie, it would be "R" or even "NC-17". I never realized Marvel and DC Comics both have adult fiction divisions, but evidently, they do and they are very profitable. And, yes, they are very dark stories indeed.

Many religious institutions are also guilty of promoting fornication and licentiousness when they condone behaviors contrary to Biblical Teaching in the name of “human nature” and “liberation theology.” I recently saw a video distributed by ECUSA stating that since many animals engage in aberrant behavior, humans’ engaging in the same behavior is only “natural” and acceptable in the sight of God. Many Protestant Churches are endorsing same-sex marriages and defending abortion, even late-term abortion, as an acceptable form of birth control. The Episcopal Church in the next edition of their Prayer Book includes ceremonies for the blessing of a divorce, same-sex marriage, and there is even a proposal to add a blessing for abortions as a “Celebration of the Rights of Women.” The Methodists, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches already have services embracing alternative lifestyles as being “gifts of the spirit.” Even this past week, the head of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, in his remarks about the passing of Rev. Dr. Billy Graham, referred to him as a “...deeply religious man and evangelist, although his theology regarding the LGBT community and women’s rights (read abortion) was deeply flawed.” 5,000 years of biblical teaching, prophecy, Mosaic Law and Christian standards of behavior disagree. I don’t think God changed His mind.

So-called “Liberation Theology” calls for a complete reordering of life to correct unjust economic, political, or social conditions. Perhaps a good concept but the way it has been corrupted has made it a danger to the

church. Churches are being told to condone unnatural behaviors and to corrupt our standards in the name of “justice and equity.” It got so bad in the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago that Catholic School principals were instructing their teachers to promote homosexuality as a gift, denigrate the nuclear family in favor of the “community as family”, and to artificially raise the grades of minorities and immigrants because of their historic poverty and race while at the same time lowering the grades of Caucasian students from more affluent backgrounds. The outrage of the parents whose children were affected was so great that it resulted in the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago stepping in to discontinue the policy and dismiss both the principals and the School Chancellor involved.

We, too, need to express our outrage against the immorality, corruption, and decadence that surrounds us. We must express our outrage at the exploitation of children, the denigration and objectification of women in the media, and the proliferation of sexually oriented material being broadcast daily into our homes by television and internet. We must express our outrage when government, religious institutions, and the media tell us we must turn our backs on Judeo-Christian laws and ethics and embrace every form of depravity as being “natural” or gifts from God.

St. Paul completes today's passage by telling us that if we reject holiness by acting and behaving immorally, we reject God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us.

We are called upon every day to make decisions between what we know is good and what is evil. I remember when I was a child, the old maxim was, "...don't do anything you couldn't do in front of your mother." It is still a good rule to follow. We must learn to walk uprightly in our life before God. It is not enough just to believe in God. Even the devil believes in God. We must live our lives as Christians following Christ's teachings.

St. James in his Epistle General writes, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Christianity isn't a spectator sport. To be a Christian requires us to actively work, pray, and give for the spread of God's kingdom. It requires us to take a stand against the forces in our world that would corrupt our children and promote evil as the natural order. It requires us to live as examples of Christ's love and to live in purity of heart and mind.

Let us then live a godly, righteous, and sober life in accordance with God's holy teachings and by walking from henceforth in His holy ways; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.