

Homily
14th Sunday in OT
July 3, 2022

Once upon a time there lived a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen. Her mother had a little red riding hood made for her. Everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One day her mother said to her: “Go my dear, and see how your grandmother is doing, for I hear she has been very ill.”

Little Red Riding Hood set out immediately.

Thus begins the famous fairy tale of loss of innocence. The child, like a lamb, goes into the world to do good and almost immediately runs into the wolf. Isn't it so with us? We begin our lives so sweet and innocent, full of excitement and adventure. And then we run into – other people and situations that lead us to choices we must make. We are presented with options and have the opportunity to choose what we do, what we say, where we go.

We live in an imperfect world. If we lived in a perfect world, there wouldn't be evil, there wouldn't be wolves. We would be safe from temptation, from opportunities to make imperfect choices. But we don't; this is an imperfect world.

This is why having a properly formed conscience is so important, so we can make good choices.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states (CCC 1785) “In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path (in no uncertain terms, this means Jesus Christ), we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice (pray unceasingly & do good deeds). We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross (the Sacrament of Reconciliation). We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (the Sacrament of Baptism & Confirmation), aided by the witness or advice of others (‘Let a righteous person strike me; it is mercy if he reproves me.’ Psalm 141:5) and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.”

Jesus told the seventy-two, “I am sending you like lambs among wolves.”

He sees us as innocent; He wants us to be innocent, yet He needs us to be prepared for those times we encounter wolves. We don't want to be blind to the evils in the world. We remember that, although we are in the world, we are not of the world. God has a higher plan for each of us.

Another way of saying this: don't be naïve; be aware of the dangers around us but remain innocent.

I recently went through company security training that taught us how bad guys get access to company information. We learned to recognize fake emails that allows them enter our company accounts and gain access to proprietary information. Some bad guys are so bold as to walk into our building and loiter around our desks, looking over our shoulders and even sitting at a workstation that wasn't properly locked in the owner's absence.

We know corruption exists, but we choose not to participate. We know that there is misconduct, but we choose not to partake. We know that people gossip, but we choose not to join in.

It is important that we know what evils are in the world, and to make sure we protect ourselves, shield ourselves from becoming involved. It is important that we are aware and informed, and at the same time prepare our defense against attacks from all that is evil.

Just like the 72 who were sent to proclaim the Good News, we are sent to share God's message of love and mercy. Just like the 72, we are instructed to 'shake the dust from your town that clings to our feet,' if our message is rejected.

But how do we know what the message is? And how do we know if that message is rejected? And how do we know if we should embrace another person's message?

That's where a properly formed conscience comes in. The world is full of messages. Some are obviously evil. Some are inviting, yet may not be the best choice. Some seem so right, until we become fixated and attached.

Remember that all in the world was created Good by Him Who is All Good. But, because of our fallen nature, because of original sin, we could make choices directly or come into contact with people and situations that can indirectly lead us down the wrong path.

All of us have the inclination to be wolf-like. All of us, because of concupiscence, have a strong desire to satisfy our physical cravings, to be comfortable, to be satisfied, lean towards wolf-like tendencies. Not that all desire is bad, we just need to know the difference between those good desires and those disordered cravings.

We are all born innocent. As we grow, we learn based on our environment, what we put into our minds, what we watch, what we listen to, how we respond and react.

So, it takes intentional effort to properly form our conscience. It takes effort to grow in an ordered way, the way God intends us to, as in God's Will, not our will, be done.

As parents, we love our children and want what is best for them. We give them the tools, training, love and encouragement they need to help them properly form their conscience. We do the best that we can, trusting that the Holy Spirit will take root and keep them on the right path.

As children, we honor our parents, we listen to them, we trust them, because we know they love us and want what's best for us. And we know they are doing the best that they can in this disordered world full of wolves.

My mom passed away last fall. I love her and I know she did the best she could. When I grew up, I realized that my life was in my hands. I love my dad and know he did the best that he could. When I grew up, I realized that my life was in my hands. I am who I am in large part by how I was raised; but now, it is up to me. I can't blame my parents or my teachers or my siblings and friends with how I am now. This is on me. I am accountable for my words and my actions.

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit took root in me. And I found help in the church and in others who helped me along my path. But ultimately, my life is in my hands. It is up to me to stay on the right path. I am responsible for forming my conscience. It's not easy, but we are all given an instruction manual in God's Word, in His Church and through His shepherds.

And sadly, there are a lot of people in the world who were influenced by me when I have acted like a wolf. For those times and events, I am truly sorry. I can't change that now, but I can seek forgiveness and try to improve myself.

We are all victims of our circumstances, but we don't have to stay victims. The choice is ours. We have the choice to properly form our consciences, to decide how we will act and what we will say given those situations when we encounter wolves.

All of us have received love in our life, and that has influenced us, formed us. We also have experienced abuse, rejection, pain, all sorts of direct and indirect negative influence. It is up to us how we respond. We are all called to love, even those who don't love us in return, who reject our love. Love is a one-way street. True love has no strings attached.

Just like the 72 disciples who were sent to share the Good News, we are sent into the world. How we react or respond is up to us. No matter how bad we've been treated, no matter how badly we've treated others, we have a kind and merciful Father, a loyal and understanding Brother, and a wise and knowing Spirit to guide us, direct us and love us.

When we encounter wolves, we must be strong to shake the dust from our sandals. And when we are received in love and kindness, we rejoice in God's love for us all.