

As evil mounts around us, can we save ourselves?

By Graham Osborne

Barely a day goes by that I don't see some growing evil in the news: threats to the faith, persecution of Christians, a culture which grows more hostile to the Church every moment. There is talk of troublesome vaccines. There are hints of an atheistic new world order forming. Some speculate that perhaps "the end" is near. What does the Church have to say about all this?

While Jesus tells us that only the Father knows the day and hour, the Catechism provides a solemn warning: "Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers (cf. Luke 18:8). The persecution ... will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" ... a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh" (CCC 675).

The basic idea is "pseudo-messianism": that man can save himself, apart from God. The question is, do we see this currently happening? My answer is, we have been seeing it for two thousand years. *But is it getting worse?*

Consider all the restrictions around this virus: close churches, stop the Sacraments to save ourselves; lock the world down and save ourselves; end climate change by reducing the world's population through abortion, contraception, euthanasia – and save ourselves. Develop vaccines from aborted baby tissue and then have theologians convince us that we can use them with clear consciences – to save ourselves. Or maybe do a "Great Reset": start a new atheistic world government that will adopt anti-Christian principles to try and end all earthly woes – to save ourselves. We break God's laws, abandon his counsel – to save ourselves!

One thing every Christian – in fact, every person in the world – must know with certainty: by our own power, apart from God, we *cannot save ourselves*.

So then, how *are* we saved? We are "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus", our first Pope answers in Acts 15. And St Paul adds that this happens through "faith working in love" (Galatians 5:6). And when Jesus is asked this exact question, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" His answer is, "keep the commandments." In other words, do grace-inspired good works!

And St James unequivocally answers our question as well: "A man is not saved by faith alone, but by works" (James 2:24). And just in case we still had doubts, he makes things crystal clear in Romans 2: "God ... will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life ... through perseverance in good works."

A Catholic understanding of salvation includes **both** faith *and* good works. *Both are necessary, but both* come through God's grace.

Faith is a gift of grace, but it still requires an act of the will to take hold of it. And similarly, a truly "good work" is never solely a product of human will, but a grace-assisted cooperation with God's will.

And so, this also precludes any idea of false messianism. Unaided, graceless human works can never save us, *particularly those that run contrary to God's will.*

But while we cannot save ourselves, we certainly can *protect* ourselves from the darkness that is gathering these days. St Paul warns us: this is *not* a battle against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. We must put on the armor of God, he insists in Ephesians 6: girded with truth, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation.

But with this armor, there is only one weapon: it is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. We can protect ourselves in battles against evil by reading, and wielding, the Word of God!

And how can we visualize this protection? My young son loves the Lord of the Rings, and the deep Christian symbolism held in literally every page. I tell him: imagine as you read Scripture, that a legion of angels comes to your defense, swinging their fiery swords and driving back the darkness, just as Aragorn and Legolas battled the seemingly impossible siege of Orcs at Helm's Deep.

We can never forget: this battle is won, but not over. Jesus Christ has destroyed death and defeated Satan. This is a theological certainty. But He still calls us to join Him in this final battle. We are God's co-workers (1 Cor 3:7-9), and we can never lose heart, no matter how outnumbered or beaten down we feel.

Never be discouraged by numbers. Never. Read the story of Gideon. How God kept telling him to send men back, until he was left with just a small handful of warriors against extraordinary odds. But when God is with you, who can be against you? Gideon shattered the opposing army, scattering the survivors across the countryside.

Jesus changed the whole world with only 12 men – and against the punishing double persecution of the Jews [led by St. Paul himself!] and the greatest power the world had ever known: the Roman army.

And Rome was not just beaten, it was *converted*. And so was St. Paul!

God often works in small numbers. Because in this way, when the victory *is* won, ***there will be no doubt who won it*** ... "In the world you will have tribulation. But

take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “Seek first the Kingdom!”
(Matthew 6:33)