

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 21, 2020

The classic 1949 Film called “The Third Man” is based on a novel by Graham Greene. Harry Lime, the main character, has been selling watered-down penicillin to unsuspecting victims in post-world war two Vienna. His scam has resulted in the deaths of thousands of men, women, and children. His old friend, Holly Martins, discovers what Harry has been up to and confronts him. Harry’s on the run from the police, but he agrees to meet Holly at a carnival. In the films, the most famous scene the two men meet on a giant Ferris wheel. Martins asks, “How could you do it?” Harry says, “For the money, of course.” “But have you ever seen any of your victims?” his friend asks. “You’re melodramatic,” Harry says and points to the people milling around far below. “Look down there,” he says, “Would you really feel any pity if any of those little dots down there stopped moving? If I offered you twenty thousand dollars for every dot that stopped moving, would you tell me to keep my money? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spend, and free of income tax too, the only way you can save money these days. Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don’t, so why should we? They talk about the people and the proletariat; I talk about fools and mugs, it’s the same thing.” Holly says, “You used to believe in God.” Harry says, “I still do believe in God, I believe in God and mercy and all that. But the dead are happier dead. They don’t miss much here, poor devils.”

Harry Lime’s grim view of humanity is self-serving, to say the least. He can’t afford to see the people he victimizes as fellow human beings with feelings, plans, and loved ones, because it would ruin his business. Harry justifies his terrible crimes by reducing people to little dots far beneath him. Reducing people rather than raising them up as Christ would have us do, is always a problem. People are more than statistics, categories, or races. And notice Harry is able to believe in God without his faith ever challenging or correcting his behavior in a significant way. Somehow, he misses the point that God sees every person as His child, valuable, and vulnerable. He misses the point that we can’t mistreat each other and still claim to be children of God.

At his installation, when he became Pope in 2005, Pope Benedict the 16th said: “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed; each of us is loved; each of us

is necessary.” Jesus often said, “Be not afraid.” In today’s Gospel, he tells us why we don’t have to be afraid. Because, as Pope Benedict put it, we are willed, we are loved, and we are necessary. If we understand that, then we approach every challenge in life, from covid19 to racism, with the assurance of God’s help and God’s grace. This week, may we see every person we meet, as a sister or brother who is willed, loved, and necessary to God, and to us.

Fr. Valentine

Scripture Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/062120.cfm>