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EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Good and Evil

Good and evil actually exist. While I rarely focus on them in these columns or my preaching, they are the central themes of literature, certainly the Bible, but also in Medieval legends and contemporary books and films, e.g., the Tolkien trilogy, the Harry Potter novels, and Star Wars.

Good and evil are not just abstract religious notions, but the determining factors of history and human life. Both are often deceptive, especially evil, which starts off like a little cancer but quickly metastasizes. Evil hides and masquerades as good. True goodness, however, is always honest and unafraid. All "isms," e.g., nationalism, fascism, communism, are a backdrop for evil, an excuse or justification for doing what otherwise would be deemed reprehensible or objectively wrong. The Holocaust is a potent example but so is our contemporary treatment of immigrants and refugees. These are clearly offenses against human decency and goodness. They expose the underside of human behavior, the cruelty and carelessness of which the world is capable. Goodness, however, points us in the opposite direction and portrays the depth of human love and kindness.

The modern penchant for weapons and the continual development of new ones is another omen of human illness. Technological advancement often starts first with military innovation. Human benefit is merely a secondary effect. Violence is often used as a primary remedy rather than the last resort. Thus, violence and death abound in our world today. Nations and individuals buy and sell weapons, stockpiling them, and then wonder why the world is unsafe. Goodness promotes peace and impedes physical and every other kind of human harm.

Evil is not just external; it lurks in the human heart. Meanness, greed, selfishness, and ill-will are all expressions of a propensity for evil. The same with lies, lust for power and self-gratification, which are particularly pernicious in those with authority for their positions are primarily intended for service. Even the best, however, are sometimes off-target, the original meaning of sin. Evil occurs because of thoughtlessness, a lack of connection to potential consequences. The word "conscience" is derived from the Latin word for thinking. When we don't think, we weaken our moral capacity. This is easy to do, by giving in to ideology, trends, group thinking, preconceived notions or uninformed opinions, and pleasure, but lack of thinking is a failure to assume responsibility. It is the cause of so many personal problems and the afflictions in the world today.