

A God in Israel versus Mary Sue (by Fr. Leon Periera)

In medieval art, the devil is anatomically challenged. He has no knees, because he does not want to kneel and adore God as he ought. And he has no genitals, because evil cannot give life or create—it can only deform a pre-existent thing. As a faithful Catholic, the author JRR Tolkien follows this idea in his writings. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo remarks, *'The [devil] can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own'*.

Modern popular culture has been impacted powerfully by such things as Tolkien's writings, Star Wars, Star Trek, and super heroes. It is unsurprising that writers and producers might be tempted to mine these sources for further tales and entertainment. In this we see Tolkien's observation about evil realised—writers unable or unwilling to create something new, simply take a pre-existing tale and reshape it. Imitation is the sincerest form of a total lack of imagination.

In these new tales drawn from Tolkien or Star Wars and the like, there are mostly female protagonists, preferably non-white. But these protagonists suffer a fatal flaw: *they have no flaws*. The technical term for such heroines is a 'Mary Sue'. A Mary Sue is the product of bad writing. A Mary Sue knows everything, does everything right, does not need to learn, does not merit anything but has everything served on her lap. There is no struggle and consequently no genuine, believable achievement. Mary Sues make the whole tale boring and wretched. When audiences vote with their feet and leave, they are accused of misogyny or racism, or both.

Chesterton said that orthodoxy was the only exciting thing in the world; by contrast heresy is boring, because it rehashes old things in new packaging. Only orthodoxy captures the imagination, and makes new beginnings and new ways possible. In the Church also, evil deforms and perverts the Faith. Evil does not engender faith. Evil does not want to kneel before the True God and worship. Heresy does not breed a new generation, because it is contracepted and sterilised. Therefore it seeks to propagate itself by commandeering and imposing itself on others, like a virus.

We see much of this in the pre-synodal reports in certain countries. They clamour for changes to doctrine and morals; they claim holiness is an ideal not a goal; and they seek to 'accompany' which means keeping people exactly where they are. What is sinful is no longer called sin. We are reassured that Hell is not eternal, or it is empty. Holiness is not sought, we are fine as we are. This attempt to change the Faith turns us all into *Mary Sues*. We all become instant saints, but without any actual holiness. There is no struggle, no cross, no sacrifice. We win instantly without playing the game. It is the boredom and joke of being Mary Sue.

In August this year more than 500 young Irish practicing Catholics wrote to their synodal steering committee, alarmed that the authentic voice of the young was being ignored. A false conclusion had been reached, they noted, 'that Church teaching needed to be re-formulated or changed' in particular

relating 'to human sexuality, marriage and ordained ministry' in order to match public expectations. The young people wrote:

As young faithful Catholics we fully accept and joyfully embrace Church teaching and practice, and do not wish for Church teaching to be changed or reformulated... We humbly suggest that these emerging concerns are instead a call *to communicate church teachings better*.

One elderly priest, part of a dissident group, dismissed this letter as 'spectacularly out of sync' and not worthy of receiving 'equal attention' as other views. He also disparaged young priests. 'They're traditional, they want to wear black... I despair of young priests. I'd prefer if we hadn't got them.' So, the truth comes out. We keep being told: *All are welcome*, except of course when they're not! We are told: *The Church must listen*, but the truth is we're not listening to you! The old priest's petty rant would be comical if it weren't so tragic.

The heretics of old at least had some courage. They were open about what they were denying. The modern heretics are more subtle. They will say, *Oh yes we agree with St John Paul, we re-affirm Church teaching*, and then in the next instant, they proceed to deny it all by their deeds. And they blame the Holy Spirit for all their errors! 'We are a listening Church and we must keep walking forwards'—but listening to whom? And where are you walking to? *O brave new church that hath such sycophants in it!*

These illusions arise when we treat God as absent. Everything then depends on us, and we hijack God's word for the sake of our passing whims. When we fail to love people enough and properly, our error manifests: by lying to them and blessing their disordered unions, by confirming them in adultery and fornication, by affirming their grave errors like abortion and rewarding them with Communion without repentance. It is the failure to love people's souls and a willingness to risk their eternal salvation. And all this for the sake of being inclusive and nice, for the sake of making ourselves popular. It is the grievous failure to be *authentically pastoral* and *genuinely loving*.

The devil lacks knees and genitals, but the clergy don't have to. We need to kneel and adore the Living God. We need to give life, not death; to teach truth, not lies. All of us need to ask ourselves: *Do we really believe Jesus is God? Do we believe Jesus is alive and active in His Church? Do we believe the Eucharist is truly Jesus, body, blood, soul and divinity?*

The Syrian Naaman realises the truth: that all other gods are false, and that the true God is in Israel. God is in Israel, that is, in the Church. The Samaritan comes back to Jesus because Jesus told him and his companions to show themselves to the priests, and he realises Jesus is the true High Priest. For us too, we can't settle for becoming Mary Sues—saints without actual holiness. The real God is not absent. We must come to Jesus. The devil cannot give life; only Jesus can give us life, new life. The Faith is not a plaything to twist to our own destruction. There is indeed a God in Israel, i.e. the Church, and He is alive and active, and He loves us more than any deformation of faith ever could!