

**Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year A
December 18, 2022**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Sympathy for the Devil” is the title of the 1968 Rolling Stones song composed by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. “Sympathy for the Devil” could also be the title of the article written by Christopher Borrelli and published by the *Chicago Tribune* about the Satanic Temple display in the rotunda of the Illinois State Capitol. What is curious is that the article appeared on page one of the December 14, 2022, print edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Page one articles of a major newspaper are usually reserved for news stories, not opinion pieces. Christopher Borrelli makes his opinion clear when he writes, “‘Tis the season for understanding. And who could use it more this holiday than the Satanists of Illinois?”

In advocating for the Satanists’ display in the rotunda, Mr. Borrelli proclaims, “Say what you will about Satanists, they know the Constitution.”

To which I respond: Not so fast. The Constitution is not as simplistic as the Satanists may think.

I am a law school graduate and I keep my license to practice law current in the State of Illinois. As any lawyer can tell you, not all speech is protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In the United States Supreme Court case *Schenck v. United States*, decided in 1919, the Court ruled that it was a violation of the Espionage Act of 1917 (amended by the Sedition Act of 1918) to distribute flyers opposing the draft during World War I. Writing on behalf of a unanimous court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic... The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent." This ruling was partially modified by *Brandenburg v. Ohio* in 1969, in which the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional guarantees of free speech and free press "except where such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action [e.g., a riot] and is likely to incite or produce such action."

Thus, there are many types of speech and expression that are not protected by law and in fact are punished by the law, such as defamation (slander if spoken, libel if written), conspiracy to commit a crime, and child pornography. The legality of “hate speech” has also been a matter of substantial debate among lawmakers, jurists, and legal scholars in recent years. In the 2003 case of *Virginia v. Black*, the Supreme Court voted 6-3 to uphold a Virginia statute making it illegal to burn a cross in public with the intent to intimidate others. Writing for the majority, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor held that even though cross burning was at times expressive, Virginia could ban cross burning because it represented a “true threat,” a category of speech that is not protected by the First Amendment.

Invoking Satan should be understood as a form of hate speech that poses a true threat to individuals as well as to society. Those who do not believe in a literal Satan but rather think that Satan is merely a literary metaphor are sadly seduced by Satan’s lies.

Jesus said this about Satan in the Gospel of John (8:44): “He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a

liar and the father of lies.” We should all reject the Devil’s lies and turn to Christ, the way, the truth, and the life.

When the leader of the Satanic Temple says that Satanism “is compatible with other religions,” that their “core tenets are moral values” such as “treat people with empathy,” and that “these tenets should work in concert to inspire nobility of thought,” he is simply lying like the Devil. True religion binds people to God and to each other in love of neighbor. Satan seeks to divide people from God and from each other.

The Rolling Stones at least got it right when they challenged listeners to guess the name behind the death sentence rendered by Pontius Pilate against Jesus, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the Nazi blitzkrieg of World War II, and the killing of the Kennedys. Their answer? “Just call me Lucifer, ‘cause I’m in need of some restraint. So if you meet me, have some courtesy, have some sympathy ... or I’ll lay your soul to waste.”

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our celebration of Christmas is now only one week from today. The true meaning of Christmas is summed up in the Gospel of John (3:16): “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

The Scripture readings today point to the promise of God's presence in one word: *Emmanuel*, a name which means, "God is with us." God has promised to be present in each moment of our lives as long as we do not turn away from Him. Staying close to God requires spending time with God—just as we do in building all loving and intimate relationships. Our time spent in prayer, getting to know God's voice, enables our hearts to listen and respond to God's generous love. The foremost way that Our Lord is with us is in the Eucharist, which is why it is crucial to attend Mass every weekend. Those who neglect to come to Mass and receive Holy Communion are distancing themselves from God's presence, His love, and His grace. This is exactly what Satan wants.

Christians look forward to eternal happiness with God in Heaven. Those who worship Satan are doomed to suffer the pains of hell with the Evil One and his minions forever. People are free to choose. Please pray for the conversion of sinners and their eternal salvation.

May God give us this grace. Amen.