

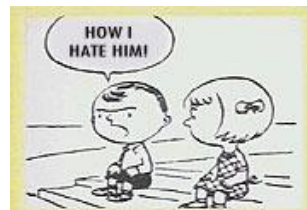
This morning I would like to challenge you in a very different way – through the words and images of a humorist – a cartoonist who also was a strong and devoted man of God and believer in Jesus Christ.

I speak of Charles Schultz, the creator and author of `Peanuts.` Peanuts, for those who don't know or remember was a cartoon with characters Charlie Brown, Lucy, Sally, Pig Pen, Schroder, Linus and of course, Snoopy. And lessons of life were learned through their encounters.

My own first recollection of Peanuts – and the theology behind the cartoon, or should I say, especially the joy and humour behind the good news found in his cartoon, came through the Christmas Classic, `À Charlie Brown Christmas.` It was the story of how a class came to know the meaning of Christmas by celebrating and making use of the great flaws and mistakes of our lives.

Yet, by the time that Christmas special was produced, Charles Schultz had been writing his cartoon for almost 2 decades. And biblical themes ran through his comic strip. Allow me to illustrate.

Take his very first cartoon, the one that introduces us to Charlie Brown. 4 images appear – three pointing to whom Charlie Brown is – that he is coming – but it is the unexpected ending that makes us laugh. `Good ol` Charlie Brown – How I hate him!



It is funny because we can see ourselves in their pettiness – in and through them, we can see our own fall from grace. They are not perfect, but neither are any of us. It is also so funny because it is embarrassing – for we too have done things similar to what the two young boys do.

The fall of man, and God`s reconciliation with us and our reconciliation with God is in fact the focus of today`s Gospel. For in it, Jesus sends out the 70 disciples, with very few possessions, to go into the world they know, to proclaim the message they have heard Jesus speak, and to drive out the evils spirits. They return filled with incredible joy, because each of them had witnessed the power of Jesus` name. They had traveled with very little, unencumbered with possessions, nothing to burden them down – just faith and joy. And they proclaimed the Good News.

And Jesus laughed – for he saw Satan falling as lightning from heaven.

This is the theme of many of the cartoons featuring Snoopy and his constant fight against the Red Baron. It is a fight between Good and Evil.

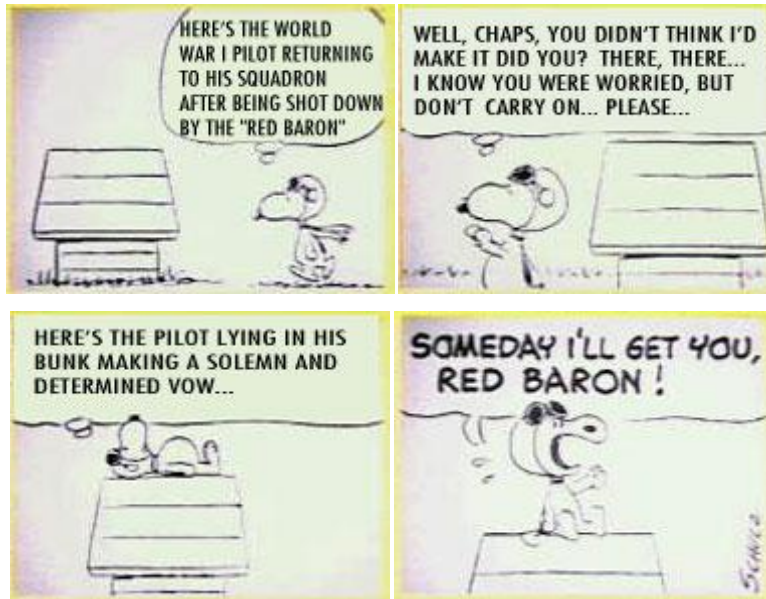




Snoopy is almost always on his trusty dog house – his Sopwith Camel, and he fights against the aristocratic villain – the Red Baron.

In the cartoon, Snoopy is suave, debonair, collected – and above that, he is cool.

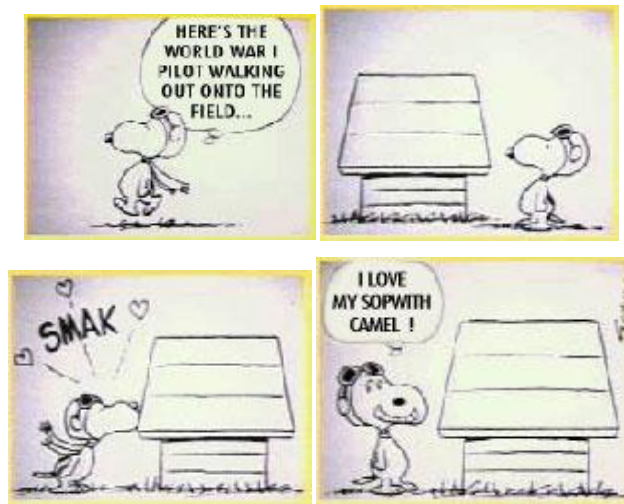
Notice his passion in the last group of captions. Curse....Curse....Curse It is this passion that makes the figure of Snoopy so compelling – for he does want to deal a blow against that which has hurt so many – evil.



Snoopy wants so much to slay the evil of this world, as did and does Christ. It is a passion that is meant to reflect the Church`s passion – that we too go into the world seeking to defeat evil wherever it may exist.

Snoopy fights a battle, and if you think about it, the battle has long since been won by the Allies over the Germans of World War I, just as the church fights a battle against evil in a battle long since won, a battle between Jesus Christ and the worldly Powers of Satan.

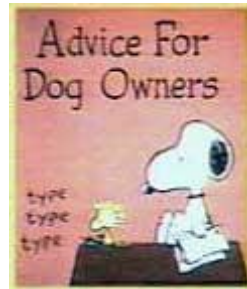
And how does Snoopy fight. It is on his Dog House, his Sopwith Camel, and this is the analogy – for as Christ loves his church, and it is through His Church – through you and I, that victory is won. This sentiment is best illustrated in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 5:25



Again this ties to today’s Gospel. For Jesus message is clear – that we are asked to go out into the world, not to sit back and wait for others to come to us – but to go out into the world and confront evil wherever this evil exists.

One of the constant themes of the Gospel is the simplicity of the Good News. We sometimes get confused into thinking that the word of God is both complex and hard to apply to our lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Thus Jesus often uses Children as props for his parables. More than that, indeed, for He tells us that unless we accept the kingdom of God as a child (with the faith of a child) we shall not enter into it.

Read these letters to the editor – simple, modern day parables, told in cartoon form. Snoopy is, in this cartoon, the Christ figure.





I do believe that Jesus laughed and laughs – his simple way of touching hearts and minds with the challenges that needed to be heard, meant that he had to enter into the lives of each of us, which includes the funny things that happen in our lives.

Another theme that Charles Schultz captured so clearly, as seen by the next series of cartoons, is that He is the Good Shepherd. Christ is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep. Isn't part of his message that each of us, at one time or another, have all wandered off – away from the shepherd – and it was He, or one that He sent that brought us back into the fold.



Again, this is one of the themes of today's Gospel, for the 70 disciples were doing just that – they were rounding up the sheep – the people of God who had wandered away – bringing them back towards the Good Shepherd.

Remember in Peanuts, there was the character of Linus. Linus was famous for his wisdom and also his reliance on his security blanket. Part of the Gospel message captured by Schultz is that we do not need to rely on our security blankets – for these quickly become false gods or false securities. Rather, we are meant to rely on the salvation already won for us in Jesus Christ.

The message is for you and for me to hear. It is good news. Good News to believe in, Good News to trust in. And to each of us, He speaks in ways that only we will understand and be able to apply to our own lives.





As you reflect on the Gospel, of the 70 going out into the world, think of the way that God is asking you to do to do the same – going out into the world unburdened by past baggage, trusting only in his word and the faith and passion He has blessed you with – and make the message real by your actions.

Remember, He is speaking to each of us – challenging us to make a difference in His world.

Amen.