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St. Luke 11:14-28
Lent 3 Oculi
March 24, 2019

In the name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Along with fasting and repentance, the season of Lent is a time when the Church emphasizes spiritual warfare. During the first Sunday in Lent, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Last Sunday, the Canaanite woman's daughter was severely oppressed by a demon. And now today, Jesus is accused of being in league with the devil.

Either Jesus casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul or he casts them out by the finger of God. Both Jesus and the crowd acknowledge that there are only two ways that humanity can go. Either you are with God, or you are with the devil. Therefore, it is true that if you do not believe in and worship the Triune God, then you worship the devil. It may be a passive worship of the devil. You may not actively seek out Satan and his demons. But nonetheless, if you do not actively worship and believe in Jesus as the Son of God, then you are passively worshipping the devil and you rest securely in his kingdom, entrapped by his demons. You cannot sit in the middle. There are no fence-riders in the realm of spiritual warfare. This is what Jesus means when he says, "Either you are with me or you are against me."

Spiritual warfare is real; it is serious. And earth, our world where we live, is the battleground. The devil and his demons seek to destroy you; they seek to harm you. The devil himself is very powerful. Jesus calls him a strong man. He is a strong man who is fully armed with power and might. Hatred and deception are his weapons that he uses so that he might entice you to forsake God and lure you away from him. His kingdom is a well-defended fortress of evil.

One of his best tactics is to cause doubt in who Jesus really is. The devil would have people say, “He casts out demons by the power of demons.” “It is not by the finger of God that he casts them out. He is not really God. He is simply a new prophet, a new Gandhi or Buddha, a new ‘spiritual but not religious’ leader.” And if that isn’t one of the most popular catch phrases of the new American Christianity—“I’m spiritual but not religious”—then I don’t know what is. People may identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious” but so do demons. Demons are certainly spiritual and they love these people because they are such easy targets.

One of the devil’s favorite lessons is to teach that good is evil and evil is good. Isaiah 5 warns against those who call evil good and good evil. They who put darkness for light and light for darkness. They who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. This is, in part, fulfilled by those in the crowd from our Gospel reading: “Jesus casts out demons in an evil way: by the power of demons!” What they are saying is that Jesus is doing a bad thing by casting out demons. The good that he does is not seen as truly good. Yet, even today, nothing has changed. Those who preach and teach traditional marriage and who condemn the murdering of babies in their mothers’ wombs are called bigots. Those who call their friends and family to repentance and to turn away from their sinful inclinations are called “hateful.” Good is called evil and evil good. This is the devil’s doctrine. He sets his sights on things that are truly good and uses all his strength and power to corrupt.

Those who commit sexual sins are particularly easy to corrupt. The majority of the Epistle readings during this festival half of the church year address turning away from and repenting of sexual sins. This is not without purpose. Sins of a sexual nature are more serious than simply playing with a Ouija board, for example. When you sin sexually against

your spouse by looking lustfully at someone who isn't your spouse or by viewing playboy magazines or by opening up certain web pages on a private browser so as to view pornography, then you are inviting the devil and demons into your bed.

It is not only the sexual sin that invites the devil and demons into our lives but sin in general. If you are so set in your pride that you feel that you must bully others into obedience or if you hold a grudge and fail to forgive your brother or sister in Christ then you do not receive God's forgiveness yourself. Instead, the devil pats you on the back, "Well done, *my* good and faithful servant," he whispers to you.

Repent. Lent is the season where the Church emphasizes repentance. So repent, and receive the absolution and forgiveness offered by Christ. He is the stronger man. He is gracious to all who have gone astray. In this way Jesus talks about himself in the Gospel reading for this morning. The devil is a strong man but Jesus is the stronger man. He breaks into the devil's kingdom, overcomes him, and takes away his armor. He is the one who attacked strong Pharaoh's kingdom and overcame him with his finger by plagues thereby reclaiming what was his—the Israelites, his people, his beloved. He led the Israelites out of bondage and slavery to a land he had promised them.

In the same way Jesus rescues you from the power of the devil and his kingdom. He leads you out from the devil's kingdom where sin and death reign and into his kingdom filled with green pastures. He leads you out from the sinful decay of this world and seats you in the pews of his kingdom, the Church where he divides his spoil among you—riches of his kingdom: bread and wine, his life, and his fortune.

Jesus is the stronger man. He overcomes the strong man by withstanding all the assaults of the devil. Jesus withstands the devil's temptations; he casts out demons by the

finger of God; and he overcomes the strong man not by overpowering him or by a mighty hand, but by love, love that lays down one's life for his friends by submitting to his Father's will and by being lifted up on a cross.

By Jesus' crucifixion and death, it would seem that the devil wins and that he truly is a strong man. But compared to Jesus he isn't. In fact, the devil is not as strong as he claims. He knows that he is going down. He knows that he stands condemned. He knows that he has been overcome and defeated by Christ. But in his desperation and fury he attempts to bring down everyone and anyone he can with him and he uses whatever means necessary.

But Jesus has already won. Jesus is the stronger man. And in the meantime, he gives us weapons to deflect the fiery darts of the devil and his demons. He freely gives us his Word. He gives us means by which we would stay alive in the fight. We don't even do the fighting. Jesus does. He shields us with his own body and restores us and purifies us with his own blood. Jesus calls us Blessed. And you are blessed because you hear the Word of God and keep it.

In +Jesus' name.