

Oculi
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+ Jesu juva +

KEEPING THE DEVIL OUT Luke 11:14-28

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Today we see our Lord casting out a demon. Luke tells us: “He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled.” Once again Jesus proves His authority and power over the devil and his demons. There isn’t even much of a battle in these dealings with the demons at this point. They simply come out at the Word of Christ. He dominates them, for He is far stronger than they are; far superior, for He is the eternal Son of God who had first created these angels that later fell.

But instead of standing in awe of His divinity, many that day questioned and accused Him. Some sought other signs, to prove His character as a messenger of God. Others charge Him with being in league with the devil against God. They claimed that Jesus’ exorcisms were not really exorcisms at all, but some kind of a demonic ploy intended to deceive people into following Him. “But some of them said, He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” The devil and his demons are, of course, full of pride; and such pride, one may reason would naturally turn them against one another.



But even selfish and prideful remains allied together when a greater foe is present. In the face of great danger petty and sometimes even serious conflicts are laid aside, in order that they may face the greater enemy together, combining their strength. And the devil and his demons are not strong enough to fight against God and His Church if they are also fighting amongst themselves. This is the interesting thing about evil – it will tolerate just about anything, except that which is righteous and good. This it cannot abide. And so the kingdom of Satan is not divided against itself, but is unified against Christ. An ancient abbot, St. Bruno of Segni, commented: “If the spirits of evil were waging war against each other, they would have had little or no power against man. Rather what

is worse than this holds; for there are scarcely to be found any number of men imbued with such unity of purpose in doing good, as the devils possess in doing evil. For though they are endless and innumerable, in this they are one, that they seek to do nothing but what is evil" ("The Kingdom of Evil" in Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, Volume 2). They were unified against God in their rebellion, and now they are unified against man in their hatred of the God who made mankind.

And so our Lord says to those who accused Him: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. I Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub." But then He goes even further to expose their hypocrisy: "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." Whenever they had heard of demons being exorcised by others, they never questioned that it was an act of God. They never imagined that demons would cast out demons before. So, if they call into question Christ's authority, they must also question the authority of other exorcists. But if they believe that others had done this by the power of God, then Christ's power must also be taken to be the very finger of God at work, the Holy Spirit.

The sides in the cosmic battle, you see, are clearly divided. Evil is united against God. And God and His kingdom is united against the evil one. So which side were these people on? That is the issue. And having shown that He is stronger than the devil, our Lord drives it home, saying: "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters." Where are you in this battle, you who accuse me wrongly, yet honor others who are lesser men than Me? The kingdom of the devil is not divided against itself. Neither will Christ abide division in His. He makes it clear. They are either with Him gathering souls unto God, or they are against Him and in league with the devil in scattering people away from God.

Our Lord also speaks a parable to illustrate His power and authority over the devil, the parable of the strong man. "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils." The strong man is the devil. The devil, through a demon, had held this poor fellow in his terrible grip. He had possessed this man and robbed him of his ability to speak. The stronger one, is of course, Jesus, who overcomes the demon and drives it out of the man. And the demon has no power to stand before Christ. All his power, armor, and weaponry is useless. He simply flees. So surely the Kingdom of God had come upon them. And so they, seeing with their own eyes what has happened, should believe.

Then our Lord shifts to talk about what happens after the demon has been cast out. The demon, finding no rest, eventually decides to come back and see

how things are with his old abode. And he finds it cleaned out and set in order, but unoccupied. And so he takes up residence again and invites other worse demons to join him. Now what is this about? Christ, of course, is the one who has cast the demon out and set the house in order. But what becomes of that house if Christ is not abiding in it? The home is empty, and unoccupied. And so it is returned, so to speak to the previous occupant. So it is with those who have received Christ, had their hearts and souls swept clean by Him and put in order, but then forsake Christ. That person's heart and soul does not remain unoccupied for long. Once a person has given up Christ, he or she has handed themselves back over to the devil. Remember, if you do not gather with Christ, you scatter against Him. There is no in between here. But if Christ remains, there is safety, peace and salvation for that person.

Christ cleaned the house of Israel and chose it to be His own special people. He gave them His Gospel covenant in which He promised to bless and keep them and give them His salvation. And they in turn were to be His own people; a people who were defined by the faithful keeping of His Word. But did most of Israel remain faithful? No they did not. Time and time again throughout their history they abandoned the God of their salvation, taking up foreign idols and a sinful way of life. They rejected God's Word and grace. And now today we find them rejecting His Son, whom He sent to them in the flesh to save them from their sins. And having been chosen by God, having received so much from Him, even His only begotten Son, and having rejected all of his goodness toward them, were they better off or worse? Our Lord indicates that they were worse off, thinking themselves to be clean, they were indeed in league with the devil against Him, and possessed in a worse way than the poor mute man had been.

And so when the woman calls out her pious accolade, saying: "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You." Jesus replies: "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

You and I have been cleansed by Christ Jesus. In our Baptism He has exorcised our demons, and brought us from the kingdom of the devil into His own. There He set our house in order. He washed it thoroughly with the waters of life, and send His Spirit into our hearts that by the Spirit Christ may dwell within us. By Baptism we become His holy abode, individually and corporately as the Church.

And as His chosen people, we are called not only to hear His Word, but to keep it also. In other words we, like ancient Israel, have been called to faith; to believe the Word of Christ and put our trust in Him. Going through the motions of being piously religious is not enough. Doing good deeds is not enough. Not even being sorry for our sins is enough. What is called for here is faith in the Word of Christ. The woman was right in piously honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary; but she missed the point by not honoring Mary's faith. It was by faith that she became the Mother of God; for she believed and clung to the words spoken to her by the angel. Had she not believed, but rejected, she would not have conceived. The Spirit would go elsewhere, for He does not force Him-

self upon anyone. And so we, having heard the Word of God and having been washed in Baptism are also to believe as she did. And receiving that Word, faith is conceived in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But now you are become a piece of the battleground between Christ and Satan. The devil longs to have you back, to take you back into bondage and death with Him. He has been cast out of heaven, defeated by Christ. He can no longer attack God directly, for Christ has put Him to shame and triumphed over Him. So the only way He can do harm to Christ Jesus is to attack you, His Christian. And so He will lash out at you, hoping by any means possible to draw you away from Christ, that He may take you into Hell to join in His damnation and torment. And in this evil, the devil and his demons are completely united. They have despised humanity since its creation, and are unified against us now. And their prime target is the Church and the Christians in it. These they hate above all others, for these are Christ's people, and they despise Him.

How do you remain safe in all of this? How do you stay out of the devil's clutches? By repenting of everything contrary to God's Word and by remaining in and with Christ. So long as He is present with and in you, the devil has no power to take possession of you (physically or spiritually). When you hold firmly to Christ and His Word, the devil must also flee from you. Remember that so long as the stronger one is there, the devil has no power to fight. But if Christ is not there, then the devil returns and quickly takes back what is given to Him. But when Christ is there the devil can do nothing. Christ is the stronger One, against whom he cannot stand. And our Lord makes you strong too, when you both hear and keep His Word by faith. And this He gives to you freely: through the Scriptures, through preaching and absolution, and through His Word made flesh and blood in Holy Communion. Through His Word He sends forth and renews His Holy Spirit in your hearts and souls. And here in His Word He comes to you again, to cleanse you, to set your house in order, and to dwell with and in you. In Him you find safety, forgiveness, life and salvation. And these things the devil can't touch. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +