

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT (OCULI)

March 3 2020

Old Test: Exodus 8:16-24

Epistle: Ephesians 5:1-9

Gospel: Luke 11:14-28

Standing...

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

In our gospel lesson, Jesus tells the religious leaders that the Kingdom of God has indeed come upon them, proving it by casting out a demon. Yet they refuse to believe.

Might that never be said of any of us.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

I've told you before

that when Jesus is said to be in league with the Devil—
that's when He starts speaking in parables.

Speaking in parables marks a drastic change
in His preaching ministry.

Let me tell you something else—which may seem unrelated, but it's not.

Sampson—you remember Sampson? He was not this strapping,
Herculean kind of guy. I know...he's always depicted that way
from movies to children's bibles.

But when you think of Sampson, think...Barney Fife
from Andy Griffith—or Screech from Saved by the
Bell—if you don't know them, I can't help you.

But think of them...with long hair—clearly, less than
average,

someone who'd never be in a body building
competition.

This is why everyone was so puzzled at the source of
Sampson's strength.

Because ***who*** the people saw, and what he was
able to do...was inexplicable.

Hold that thought...

In our gospel lesson,

a demon has taken up residence within a man,
 making him both unable to speak, and, according to Matthew,
 blind.

This demon holds this man prisoner in darkness and silence.
 With no one to free him from this dreadful condition—
 but Jesus can.
 No demon can stand up to Jesus.
 This bodily possession ends as soon as Jesus says so.

Again, **Who** the people saw do this on one hand,
 and what He was able to do on the other—was inexplicable.
 Jesus is more powerful than demons!
 Casting them out with a word.
 “This can’t be the Son of David, can it?”
 “This isn’t the promised Messiah, is it?”

Absolutely not—
 The Pharisees say, “We know His trick!”
 “He does all this by the power of Beelzebul!”
 which means, “Lord of the flies”—a mocking title for Satan.

The Pharisees were saying,
 You people are impressed by what Jesus does because you’re
 untrained.
 You’re nothing but gullible crowds.
 Go back home folks—nothing more to see here.
 Jesus takes orders from Satan—that explains what He’s
 doing.

But Jesus knows who He is, Who sent Him, and for Whom He speaks.
 He is not in collusion with the Devil—
 and He explains that their argument is illogical and inconsistent.
 He continues by telling them who they’re dealing with...He says,
*But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons,
 then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

Finger of God...

That’s a reference to when God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt.
 Remember when Moses threw down his staff and it became a snake?
 Pharaoh’s magicians did the same, by means of their dark arts.
 Their staffs turned into snakes too but were gobbled up by
 Moses’.
 Nevertheless, they were able to change them. Pharaoh wasn’t
 impressed.
 Then came the first two plagues—
 of water turning to blood and,

of calling up frogs to infest the land.
Pharaoh's magicians again were able to replicate these

because demonic forces were at work...
But when that third plague struck...

the one with the gnats,
even though the magicians tried,
they could not replicate that.
The demons couldn't help anymore.
Pharaoh's magicians knew,

Moses is being helped by One
stronger than demons, telling
Pharaoh,

"This is the finger of God."
So, the logic goes, if pagan,
Egyptian magicians could
recognize the finger of God,
Jesus is asking the Pharisees,
*Then why can't you do the
same?*

See...the crowds are right.

Jesus is the Son of David.

Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Messiah ushering in the kingdom of God.
And to prove it, He lays His finger on the demoniac so as to deliver him.

So, this is not collusion with the Devil—this is an invasion
of the Devil's territory.

And speaking of invasion...

Jesus points out the proper scenario between Himself and the Devil.
Hear it again. Jesus says,

*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his
goods are safe;*

This is Jesus describing the Devil and the way he haughtily rules the world.
What are the strong man's goods? Beloved, it's the souls of mankind,
specifically, the man whom Jesus just delivered that everybody
saw

and were amazed by.

And like Sampson of old, Jesus is stronger than the strongman—

You can't tell by looking...but He is.

And He's not afraid—not in the least bit.

Jesus enters the strong man's palace,
binds him and then rescues the possessed man—

doing so right under the strong man's nose.

Then Jesus adds,

Whoever is not with me is against me—

those against Him were the ones saying that He was in league with the Devil.

And again, *Whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

It's the dividing line between Satan and salvation.

There are two parties, either of light or of darkness, either of God or of Satan.

And this "either/or" runs throughout Scripture.

Two trees in the Garden.

Two places to spend eternity.

There is no third possibility, no middle ground, no neutrality.

Jesus then issues a warning,

describing what we cannot see—but He can.

And because we can't see it, we take it by faith.

What does a demon do when it's been cast out?

When He's been exorcized?

Jesus explains,

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places—waterless places—demons can't stand baptism—they go there...seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

How scary is that?

We're more concerned about Coronavirus, COVID19—

but we think nothing about expelled demons who wander around, finding no place to dwell, returning then to its former abode.

If he finds it swept and put in order,

but vacant—and that's what Jesus is warning against, the demon then moves back in—this time with more demons.

Jesus is telling us, there must be a different kind of Spirit indwelling the person,

a Holy Spirit to guarantee that an unholy demon never comes back.

Gratefully, Jesus expels the powers of darkness by means of Holy Baptism—

where He applies the salvation won on the cross to you.

Baptism is the finger of God at work, for you...
 causing unholy spirits and their threats to be cast out—
 so as to make room for the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Sure, to the unbelieving eye,
 baptism looks like nothing more than some ancient, churchly ritual.
 Yet, with the eyes of faith, it's Jesus binding the strong man,
 ransacking his palace and
 bringing you into the safety of His Church,

where Jesus says, "This one belongs to Me!"
 St. Paul says it like this,
*He (Jesus) has delivered us from the domain of
 darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his
 beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the
 forgiveness of sins* (Colossians 1:13-14).

Or, as we learn in the Small Catechism, "He
 (Jesus) purchased and won me from all sins,
 from death and from the power of the devil;
 not with gold or silver, but with His holy,
 precious blood and with His innocent suffering
 and death that I may be His own and live under
 Him in His kingdom..." as opposed to living
 under the tyranny of the Devil.

This is why those parents who delay in having their child baptized—saying,
 "We'll wait until itty bitty decides for himself..."
 They don't wait for itty bitty to decide about when to eat—
 or when to sleep—to be vaccinated—or when to get clean
 clothes...
 but we'll wait on baptism...
 How foolish can one be?

Jesus is stronger than the strong man, and Jesus delivers you.
 But those demons...they don't give up do they?
 This is why the Devil must not only be driven out, but he must be kept
 out.

Because even the baptized can over time, harden their heart to
 those things that insulate them from the threat of demons.
 And what are those things that insulate us from the threat of
 demons?

Beloved, you're doing it right now.
 Hearing the Word of God and guarding it.
 By being where God delivers His gifts to you.

See because, wherever Jesus is with His gifts—that's where the kingdom of
 God is!

By being where the Word of God is proclaimed—that's the kingdom of God!
 By being where faith is bestowed—that's the kingdom of God!
 By being where the forgiveness of sins is received—that's the kingdom of God!

And by feeding on Him in His Holy House—that's the kingdom of God—for you.

Which will always insulate you from the Devil
 and his demonic hoard.

Well, at this point in our lesson, a woman calls out praising Jesus' Mother,
 "Blessed is the womb that bore you and breasts at which you nursed."

Blessed are the organs that gave you life Jesus.

Yet Jesus responds with a blessing of different organs, namely one's ears—

He says, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

Those who do not despise preaching and His Word,
 but hold it sacred and gladly hear it.

Beloved, that's what you do by coming to where your Lord Jesus meets you to fill you with His Word and feed you with His Body and Blood.

Never forget: Jesus is stronger than the strong man.

And you are His treasured possession.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offertory

Sitting...

Remember, the offering plates are in the Narthex for you to place your attendance cards and tithes and offerings in as you leave. We will continue with the Prayers of the Church in just a moment.