

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

“As he [Jesus] said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!’ But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’”

Jesus speaks those words after he something happened. St. Luke, by divine inspiration recorded for you, “Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,’ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.”

Here’s the scene before you this morning. Some of the people were accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the devil. Think about that and how ridiculous it is what they are saying. Jesus points this out to them. “But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.’”

The work of the devil is ridiculous and likewise so is sin. Sin is ridiculous in what it thinks and twists things to be. Jesus is the Truth, however, and he cuts through all this and exposes the lies. You will hear more about this is a couple of weeks on Judica. Jesus lays out what it is he is doing and what this means for the people listening and for you today. Jesus cast out demons by the finger of God just as the finger of God worked a miracle and rebuked the Egyptians in the Old Testament reading. The Kingdom of God had come in Christ, and he overcame the devil and his kingdom. Jesus did this by his perfect obedient life and his atoning death. The resurrection proclaims his victory in all this, and you are justified before the throne of God.

So, where do you fit in all this? This is what Jesus has done and who he has called you to be in the waters of Holy Baptism. You are not under the devil’s kingdom but live under Christ and his eternal Kingdom. For you, hearing this today as Christians Jesus is warning you. He goes on after rebuking the people, who accused him, by giving this vivid warning, “‘When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places 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.’”

There is a danger to fall away from the faith. This is called apostasy. The fault, though, never lies with God. God keeps you in the faith and guards and protects you. He does this through his means of grace, his word and sacraments. The words of antiphon of the introit today, from which the name of this Sunday is derived, orients you as you go through this life. “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.” In your life, fix your eyes on Jesus and don’t take them off him.

The danger and warning then that you are to see, mark, and avoid is how sin and the devil are trying to tear you away from Christ and his Kingdom. To be sure there are always elements that you are to avoid where the devil likes to operate as you think about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment with things like satanic arts, or witchcraft as the older language puts it. Don’t mess with that stuff like fortune telling, Ouija boards, new age spiritual practices, or anything else that goes along with it. Don’t touch it, don’t let your guard down. Resist those things and have no part with them.

But you see, this goes beyond this as well as it speaks to your daily lives. 1 John 3 connects this as it teaches you, “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” You are warned against the devil in your life and his connection with sin.

This is explained more in the words of the Epistle reading. They warn you and they teach you. This is important as you see the Gospel reading and the danger you face as you go through this world. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

God warns you against what is the way of death and really the way of the devil and urges and encourages you to what is the way of the righteous. All of this is rooted and grounded in the fact of what Jesus has done for you and God tells you who you are in the last three verses, “Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).”

The devil likes you to forget or reject who God has called and made you to be as a Christian. He wants you to think he is the victor rather than the old evil foe who has been defeated, and one little word can send him fleeing. God exhorts you in James 4, “Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

This is all why you are to examine your life daily and see where you have sinned against God. These are serious things. Confess your sin and repent. Don't be on the losing side. Don't forget, reject, or neglect who God has made you to be as his children. Know who you are through the Holy Scriptures and as you receive his sacraments and what this means. Daily repent and return to the Lord.

The devil is strong, but Jesus is the Stronger Man who has redeemed you. In the baptismal waters your sin is forgiven, you have been rescued from death and the devil and given eternal salvation. There is a promise in the antiphon of the Introit from Psalm 25, “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.” God will deliver you from any snare the devil may throw your way. The devil has lost. His kingdom is laid waste. This week at the capitol the satanic group is going to hold a “black mass.” In a sense, this is akin to a losing party. Rather than the feast that is the divine service where you have forgiveness, life, salvation, and the eternal victory, they are invoking death and the devil. There is no lost irony among the Christian Church in all this as God will always have the last word and he cannot be mocked. They, the satanic group, are rejoicing in losing and eternal death. Lord, have mercy upon them. God grant them repentance that they see the Light and Life that is Jesus and his salvation who has died for them. Pray and confess the faith and don't get tangled up in the devil's lies.

There's great comfort for you today, dear saints of God, as you gather and listen to these words of God given to you. At the end of the Gospel reading it says, “As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice

and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

God has redeemed you in Christ. The Large Catechism beautifully proclaims this as you know and have Jesus who is your Lord, “For when we had been created by God the Father and had received from Him all kinds of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil. So we fell under God’s wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, just as we had merited and deserved. There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God—in His immeasurable goodness—had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness. He came from heaven to help us. So those tyrants and jailers are all expelled now. In their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, every blessing, and salvation. He has delivered us poor, lost people from hell’s jaws, has won us, has made us free, and has brought us again into the Father’s favor and grace. He has taken us as His own property under His shelter and protection so that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness. Let this, then, be the sum of this article [2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed]: the little word *Lord* means simply the same as *redeemer*. It means the One who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same.”

You belong to Jesus and that means everything. Your Lord has saved you and he keeps you safe. He preserves you and the devil has been defeated. As you go through this life, just as you face temptation, you face the devil as one who has the victory already in Christ. You have been clothed with Christ and all his righteousness is yours through faith. You wear the full armor of God. Send the devil fleeing as on Christians can do. The word of God is your sword, and you are blessed by God as you have this word. God’s Holy word and sacraments guard and keep you in the faith for this none other than the Holy Spirit at work in your life delivering to you the salvation of Christ and Christ himself. You are not alone either in all this as you have been called and gathered into the ark of the Church with your fellow saints. Even when the waters rise and the sky darkens, you will not fear for your Lord is the Light and Life. Rejoice this day and fix your eyes to the Lord in faith for one day all the assaults of sin, the devil, and death will end, and your eyes will see Jesus face to face and be with him all his saints forever.

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