

March 7, 2010

SOLI DEO GLORIA
Third Sunday in Lent
LUKE 11:14-28

Good Shepherd, Novi

JESUS DRIVES OUT THE EVIL ONE.

In the name + of Jesus.

The battle rages on. We are in the Church Militant, and so we are constantly fighting, struggling, and striving. There are no days off. There is no cease fire. There can be no peace treaty.

The battle rages on. You are in the Church Militant. Sin is crouching at your door and desires to have you; but you must master it. The devil is a roaring lion. He is on the prowl, and he is seeking to devour you. Resist him. The world and all its evil desires are trying to lure you away from Christ. The daughters of men are still trying to ensnare the sons of God. **My son, if sinners entice you, do not give into them. (Proverbs 1:10)**

The battle rages on. We are in the Church Militant. We have heard the words of encouragement to remain true and pure and right: **“Be imitators of God, therefore.... Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” (Ephesians 5:1,3)** We know these things are true, but we find it hard because we are not very strong. We grow tired. We become weak and weary. There are days when we wonder if it would just be easier to surrender. Then we would not have to suffer from battle fatigue. We would not have to struggle or fight anymore. We could just give way to all of the temptations, and life would become easier.

All of this only proves that you are not the strong man. You cannot keep your own house swept clean and put in order. The strong man is the devil. **“On earth is not his equal” (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, TLH 262:1);** and he desires to have you. That is why the struggle is so intense. That is why you are in the Church Militant; for, the battle does not end.

You and I cannot overtake the strong man. He wants to bind us to sin. He wants to seal us with death. We cannot exorcise him with any amount of will power or discipline. He is fully armed, and wants to guard and keep us as his own possessions. **“But for us fights the Valiant One whom God himself elected.” (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, TLH 262:2)**

Jesus drives out the evil one. He is the stronger man who attacks and overpowers the devil. Jesus Christ has stripped Satan of his armor in which he trusted. Satan trusted that your sins would condemn you; so Jesus has taken away your sin. He was condemned for you. By his death, Jesus put an end to your death.

But it is more than that. Satan relies on more than sin and death to possess you. Satan relies on your own pride. He relies on you coasting through life, giving little thought to your sins. He relies on you comparing yourself to others so that you will be repulsed by them and then will congratulate yourself for being better. He relies on you thinking that occasional bouts of vulgarity, impurity, drunkenness, gossip, slander, and manipulating cannot harm you because you are basically good. Satan relies on you being convinced that as long as you are behaving, your behavior will save you. It is a very attractive armor to put on and to trust in. It gives the illusion that we are good and that God should reward us accordingly.

The evil one is a deceiver. He doesn't care if you are good, as long as you think your goodness will save you. But that is why Jesus must drive Satan completely out. He drives out the evil one, and then he shows you that you are still weak and powerless. Remember what he told you that you are suppose to be like: **“Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.”** (Ephesians 5:3-6) Not even a *hint* of sin should be among you. And yet, you sin daily. It is because you are weak. You grow weary of the struggle. You even find it appealing to give into sin because life will be easier if you did. You are weary of the battle, because you are powerless to win it.

That is why you need the Stronger Man. Jesus drives out the evil one. He destroys all of his armor. He unveils all of his deceptions. He shows you that you are utterly helpless in the fight so that you will finally admit and confess, *“Lord, I can't do this! I am lost. I have no chance, because I have no power.”* And that is right. And now you are properly trusting in Jesus who does all the work for you.

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. (Luke 11:14) Jesus did not ask the man to help him drive out the demon. The man could not even request Jesus' help. He was mute. It was Jesus' work the whole time. Once Jesus had driven the evil spirit from him, the man was able to speak. He could not claim credit; he could only give thanks. He did not work; he only received the benefits of Jesus' work.

And that is exactly how Jesus works for you too. Jesus drives out the evil one. Jesus destroyed the devil's work by his death and resurrection. That is where salvation was won, but it is not where salvation is given. To save you, Jesus must speak the word. It is in Holy Baptism that Jesus exorcises the evil spirit from your heart and gives you his Holy Spirit. It is in Holy Absolution that Jesus drives the evil spirit from you and renews a right spirit in you. It is in Holy Communion that Jesus continues to keep your heart clean, your house well swept, and everything put in order.

This is where the Stronger Man gives you new armor in the battle against the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. In fact, Jesus **is** your armor. We might even call him a Mighty Fortress. If you are taking refuge in that fortress, you remain safe from all of the devil's attacks. If you are in Christ, sin and death cannot harm you.

That does not mean the battle is over, however. We are still in the Church Militant. We are constantly fighting, struggling, and striving. There are no days off. There is no cease fire. And we grow tired. We find it hard because we are not strong. We are weary from battle fatigue. In fact, we are helpless.

But Jesus drives out the evil one. He opens our mouths and gives us something to say. Our words are both praise and confession, as we join in with King David: **“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.... He is my stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior...”** (2 Samuel 22:2,3) And so we come to the Lord daily, repenting of our sins and pleading for his mercy. We cast

all of our hopes upon the Lord, knowing that he alone delivers us from sin, death, and the devil. We daily call upon the Lord in prayer so that he will be our strength.

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it,” (Luke 11:28) says the Lord. Yes, blessed are you, because it is truly the word of God which keeps you. You need not fear the devil in his vicious attacks. One little word can fell him; and that word is the Word made flesh. Jesus has overpowered the evil one. Jesus drives him out, and he keeps you safe.

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