

**OCULI / THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**

Text: St. Luke 11:14-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Is it not rather odd, though I guess one should not be surprised, that evil always seems to claim the moral high ground? It does not take much to see what I mean. We only need to take a good look at the world and culture around us. We could discuss any number of man's contemporary perversions but that might take far longer than you are willing to listen to me speak. So, for the sake of expedience, let us take the issue of homosexuality for instance.

We Christians believe what God tells us in Holy Scripture: *“There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog (that is, a sodomite or homosexual) to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.”* and *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God.”* and finally, *“The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.”*

Now, it seems to me that God's Word is pretty clear here, as well as in many other places in Holy Scripture, just what God thinks of homosexuality; it is an abomination, a sin, that, left unrepented of and unconfessed, will condemn one to eternal hell.

Yet, to the world and most of those caught up in this unfortunate sin, that does not seem to matter all that much. What matters most for them is what they *feel* about the issue. As a result, to justify themselves in their sin, they claim the moral high ground, maintaining that if you are against the sin of homosexuality, indeed, if you call homosexuality a sin at all, then you are a bigot and a hate monger, or you have some imagined psychological malady and so you are *“homophobic.”* Worse yet, you are a hypocrite, because you too are a sinner. Therefore, how dare you cast the first stone?

But, what those who support the homosexual agenda do not seem to understand, is that it is not that we who oppose homosexuality see ourselves as somehow holier or less sinful than they are; that is a ridiculous argument on the face of it, after all, the texts I have just read to you speak of many more sins than just that of homosexuality, as indeed, does all of Holy Scripture. Yet there is an important difference between those who confess CHRIST as their LORD and SAVIOR and those who confess the ever-changing values of this capricious world and their own sinful flesh.

The all-important difference is that Christians do not wallow in their sins; they do not celebrate their sins; they are not in your face with and proud of their sins. Instead, they recognize their sins for the evil they are and sincerely repent of them, seeking God's forgiveness and strength to do better. With contrite hearts, Christians repent of their sins, confessing them to God, our FATHER, even as they seek His mercy and forgiveness with a confident assurance that through His SON, JESUS, we are, indeed, forgiven, reconciled, and restored to God through faith in CHRIST's all atoning sacrifice.

So, it is, that true Christians pray for those who suffer under the weight of the sin of homosexuality, all the while confessing that their own sins are no less loathsome before God. It is out of love, born of faith in JESUS, that believers in CHRIST call what is evil, evil, and what is good, good, and this same love motivates a Christian to call homosexuality evil.

This, however, is not the way of the unbelieving world nor the way of the wicked. Unbelievers and the wicked call what is good, evil, and what is evil, good. In that way, they can soothe their guilty consciences and portray themselves as good, noble, righteous, and compassionate, while what is truly good, noble, righteous, and compassionate, is portrayed by the wicked as something that needs to be avoided. Nothing seems more effective for Satan and his subjects than giving an evil label or name to that which is good or insinuating that those who endeavor to follow the Word of God do so only out of evil intent.

That is what is happening to our LORD JESUS in today's Gospel reading. How could anyone see JESUS cast a demon out from a man and call Him evil? Yet, that is exactly what the unbelievers, who could always be found hovering around the edge of the crowds that followed JESUS, did. Our text tells us, "*Some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.'*" They were accusing JESUS, the SON of God, who is in fact, God Himself, to be in league with Satan. They were calling God evil and were sinning against the HOLY SPIRIT.

In this way, in claiming that JESUS was a tool of Satan, they thought they were claiming the moral high ground for themselves. They placed themselves above JESUS and above His FATHER. They attempted to plant the seed of doubt in the minds of the

people. And apparently, it worked, for others, seeking to test JESUS, “*sought from Him a sign from heaven.*” But, in this, they showed *themselves* to be tools of Satan and sons of the devil. For this is exactly what Satan attempted to do when He tempted JESUS in the desert, and this is what he would do again when, through those who hated and crucified CHRIST, he tempted Him to save Himself and come down from the Cross.

One would think that JESUS’ power over the mute demon was all the sign these blasphemers should need to believe JESUS is their long-awaited MESSIAH, but they were too busy worrying about what all this would mean to their place and their comfort and standing in their community. In JESUS, the Kingdom of God was standing in their midst and they refused to recognize Him.

These unbelievers refused to recognize JESUS for who He is because they belonged to the strong man, that is, they belonged to Satan. They were content and at peace in his palace. They did not want someone to come along and upset the status quo. They were happy in their delusions, and JESUS was seen by them as a threat to those delusions. So, like the politicians and mainstream media of today, they put their own spin on what they just witnessed. They could not admit the truth because they hated the truth. The truth counters everything they believed and everything they desired to be true. So, JESUS, and later, those who followed Him, were cast as evil servants of Satan instead of the SON of God and disciples of CHRIST.

You know, things have not changed all that much today, and I am not speaking simply of secular issues such as the media or politics, or even issues such as homosexuality, I am speaking about the Church.

Oh, we are much more spiritually astute than the Pharisees and the others that hated and confronted JESUS; or at least we believe we are. Not many, if any in the Church today, would publicly claim JESUS was a pawn of Satan. That would be the equivalent of ecclesiastical suicide. But there are more than you might imagine, even in the Christian Church, who would maintain that JESUS was delusional, and the claims He makes about Himself, as well as the claims the Church makes about Him and His teachings, are all make-believe.

That is right. Many claim that nearly everything we believe, teach, and confess about JESUS was all made up by an early group of self-interested individuals whose twisted agenda was so evil that their whole religion was based on pushing a particular self-serving lie on the culture around them that they might garner power and prestige for themselves. How that opinion is reconciled with the facts and ultimate demise of the apostles for their confession of faith in CHRIST, I am not sure. I suppose those who despise the Church would say they got what they deserved.

Thus, some hold and believe that the Apostolic doctrines or teachings of the Church are evil and divisive; that the only way to grow the Church and find true peace is to do away with such “*man-made*” doctrines and become more inclusive and less exclusive. They believe we should not be Lutheran Churches with pure teaching, but community churches where anything goes. They maintain that we should open our arms and welcome every belief and confession that comes our way; that personal experience, conscience, and human reason should be the final authorities in the Church, such that, in the end, spiritual authority is not to be found in the Words of Holy Scripture, Words which are the very Word of God, but in ourselves, in our opinions and feelings.

Such people take the moral high ground and claim that what is truly good, noble, and compassionate is to remove the teachings of CHRIST, or at least to water them down a bit and replace them with the teachings and philosophies of man and the ever-changing winds and whims of cultural trends and standards.

“*We must become more tolerant,*” they say. “*Creeds, confessions, and doctrine,*” they claim, “*only serve to divide.*” But what these poor souls do not seem to understand is that if the Church claims to honor God, but has no room for CHRIST and His teachings, it is no longer the Church of God, but is, in fact, the synagogue of Satan. You see, just as every person, every house of worship has its occupant, either CHRIST or Satan, and in a world where demons roam, there are no empty houses.

What of you? Are you with JESUS, or against Him? Do you gather or scatter? Do you believe Holy Scripture is the divinely inspired Word of God, inerrant in all its parts, that it gives us the whole counsel of God, all that is needed for this body and life, or do you believe that the Bible only *contains* the Word of God in so far as it has not been corrupted by man or outdated by time and new cultural morés and standards?

Remember, you cannot have it both ways. “*You cannot drink the Cup of the LORD and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the LORD’s Table and of the table of demons.*” Remember this also, if you insist on taking the position of the golden middle, if you are lukewarm, JESUS promises to vomit you from His mouth. The house that is cleaned and swept after Beelzebub is expelled must be occupied by the One who rehabilitated it—JESUS CHRIST—or its last state will be worse than the first.

But, “*blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!*” Blessedness comes through humble submission and obedience to the Word of God, to treasure it and believe it and its promises. It comes in clinging to the one Sign that has any value in this life—the crucified and risen CHRIST.

This Sign, we are given in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism where the Finger of God etches His Name onto your forehead and your heart marking you as one redeemed

by CHRIST the Crucified. *“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the LORD.”* JESUS, the Stronger Man has shined His light into your darkness. He came upon the strong man and overcame him. He plundered you from Satan and claimed you as His own. Washed clean of all sin in JESUS’ precious Blood, you are rescued from the strong man’s domain. You no longer suffer from mute demons who would rob you of your confession, but can now, with all the angels and saints in heaven, sing in praise of God and the Lamb. *The strife is o’er, the battle done; Now is the Victor’s triumph won; Now be the song of praise begun.* (LSB 464)

Yes, the battle is over. But in this life, we still struggle against the old evil foe and our sinful flesh and worldly desires. The strong man, the devil, tempts, taunts, and torments you. Satan still believes he has power and so he roams around looking for someone to devour. But you are not alone upon the plain. For you fights the valiant One, the stronger Man, the Stronger God-Man—JESUS! He has destroyed the devil’s armor of sin and the grave, and one little word can fell him—the Word JESUS. JESUS, the Name that is above every name.

JESUS, *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* JESUS, the Lamb of God who was slain and yet lives. JESUS, who laid down in death to give you His life. JESUS, who sacrificed His Body and poured out His Life-Blood in death on a cross, that you may eat and drink that very same sacrifice and live. JESUS, the Resurrection, and the Life, the One in whom we live, breathe, and have our being. JESUS, who shall pluck your feet out of the net, who has turned toward you and had mercy on you. Unto Him do we lift up our eyes and find mercy and deliverance. Yes, in this life we struggle, but let us never forget that JESUS holds the field forever.

Therefore, we have nothing left to fear from the strong man. He is a lion, but without teeth, without claws. He has been overcome by the One stronger than he, our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. He has been bound and gagged, to be cast into the outer darkness. *“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God,”* and hear JESUS say, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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