

Jesus is Lord. That is the basic confession of the Christian faith. It is to confess Jesus as the God of Israel. When the word “Lord” is printed in your Bibles in all capital letters, that is telling you that the Hebrew word used there is “Yahweh,” the personal name of God that was given to Moses in the Burning Bush. This is the one true God, the Holy and Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is the God to whom the psalmist prays:

**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. To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in You.**

When we sang this Psalm in the Introit, as we do with all the psalms when they are prayed in the church, it then ended with the *Gloria Patri*, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” Those words confess who it is who speaks or is spoken to in the psalms. The God of Israel was the Holy Trinity.

When Israel cried out in the agony of slavery in Egypt, when tyrannical Pharaoh held them in the clutches of oppression, their cries went up to the Triune God. We read at the end of Exodus chapter 2, **“The Israelites groaned because of their slavery. They cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. So God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel, and God watched over them”** (Ex 2:23b–25).

When Pharaoh refused to heed God’s call to let His people go, God struck Egypt with all His wonders. While the Egyptians had various gods for the forces of the natural world, the God of Israel showed Himself to be Lord of all creation. While the magicians of pharaoh could duplicate the first two plagues, turning water into blood and calling up frogs by the power of demons, they were unable to replicate the later plagues. You heard in the Old Testament reading how, though **“they tried by their secret arts to produce gnats,”** they could not. They confess to Pharaoh, **“This is the finger of God.”** They recognize that the God of Israel is at work, that He is above the power of the demons whom the Egyptians worship as gods. They recognize there is no contest between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt.

God then sent flies upon Egypt, but this time, He set apart the land where His people dwelt. Now, I want to take some time to consider the significance of this point being made in the text. Because that seems to indicate to us that at least the first three plagues, the Nile turned to blood, the frogs, and gnats, affected God’s people as much as they did the Egyptians. The righteous often are not exempt from the suffering that afflicts this world. Believers can be just as overtaken by trials and fear. But with the Israelites, their suffering the plagues was not because of God’s judgment upon them for their sin, like Job they could plead innocence of grave transgression. It was a reminder to them of their constant need for repentance as sinners, just as Christians today are to see every disaster and tragedy as an occasion to repent. But it was also an occasion for the children of Israel to believe and trust God’s promise, that through these plagues which they themselves had to endure for a time, they would be delivered. God works the good of His people through such things. And in the time that is in accordance with His wisdom, He grants sweet relief.

For we see in the fourth plague, though the buzzing horde of flies filled all the houses of the Egyptians, they were prevented from entering the homes where God’s people dwelt. God is their Master and Lord. The bounds that He sets stand. Even the flies must be obedient. You have to wonder what it was like to be an Israelite, seeing that mass of free-flying creatures unable to come into the area you lived in.

Jesus, in today’s Gospel shows Himself to be Lord, the God of Israel. He is above the demons. He is their Lord in the sense that as true God He is over all things. We see this in other instances where Jesus encounters those oppressed by demons and the demons are subject entirely to His command. They must ask where to be sent when they are cast out. There is no contest between the powers of darkness, and the Light.

And yet some of the people there charge Jesus with working by the power of demons. There is a certain irony in their use of the name Beelzebul. It means “Lord of the Flies.” It was the name for a demon worshiped by the Philistines. Jesus is, in fact, Lord of the Flies, not through demonic influence that seeks to imitate and mock God, but because He is the Lord of everything. He is, as the Scriptures call Him, the Hand and Arm of God. Through Him the Father does all things. And He works by the power of the Spirit; Jesus calls Him, “**the finger of God.**” All three Persons of the Holy Trinity work to deliver and save, not just Israel of old, not just a poor demon oppressed man, but you.

Jesus speaks of you when He says that those who hear the word of God are blessed when, in hearing it, they keep it, that is, they lay hold of it, they guard it in their hearts with the same tenacity that Pharaoh guarded his free slave labor, the same determination that Satan guarded humanity as his prize possession. This is why the psalms appointed for today’s liturgy speak of lifting up the eyes to God. When the Word of God is held fast in the heart, the sufferings of this life drive our eyes upward.

For we are surrounded by all manner of things that can easily drive us into unbelief. Do not think yourself immune to this. The Israelites who saw the flies held at bay, who walked through the Red Sea on dry land and saw Pharaoh’s host drowned, these same, despaired of God’s care for them, rebelled against Moses, and fell into unbelief. Jesus warns you of the soul that is cleansed and put in order, but not filled with the Word of God. Such souls are easily overtaken and put in a worse state than before. It happens. We hear of it in the Parable of the Sower. The devil uses times of testing, and the cares and pleasures of this life to lead Christians to fall away.

False teaching is corrupting mainline churches to the point of outright apostasy. The sexual immorality of which St. Paul writes in today’s epistle worms its way into the hearts of believers and runs amok, robbing them of the inheritance of the kingdom. Open attack by an unbelieving world shames believers into silence, or entices them through various other obligations to prioritize other things above the hearing of God’s Word. And we are reminded quite recently of the sheer crippling power of fear. We are now at the point where there are more worries about stock accounts than infection. There is more mourning over cancellation of the idol of sports than over those who have died. Catastrophe, suffering, and want expose our idols rather easily.

But it was quite striking to me this past week, to see how well all the readings, hymns, and prayers appointed for today teach us how to respond to what is going on in our world, nation, and city as Christians. The psalms teach us to direct our eyes to the Lord, to call upon Him for forgiveness, deliverance, and mercy. The Old Testament and Gospels remind us of who the true God is, who is over not just nature, but also the forces of evil that work through nature to frighten and throw the world into chaos.

And the hymns have us preach to one another of Christ’s victory and the peace that comes even now in midst of the venomous darts of the enemy, of the failure of all earthly armors, and the assaults of sin. In the midst of affliction, attack, and fear, we pray in confidence to the Lord Jesus who is over all things, at work in all things for the good of His church. That is what faith lays hold of. It is something that the world and unbelievers cannot, refuse to understand. It is what even we Christians struggle to believe.

In the hymn of the day, really the whole liturgy, has us ask for peace. Not the peace for which earthly powers strive, the mere absence of violence and oppression. We gather here in church and in our homes and ask for, and you do, indeed, receive, the peace that passes all understanding. The peace that is given because the kingdom of God has come upon you. The Holy Trinity has acted in this world in history, in your life, to bestow Christ’s victory over your enemies of sin, death, and the devil upon you.

The strong man, the devil, has been bound and despoiled by the Stronger Man, Christ Jesus. You are His own possession. You do not belong to this world. Your hopes and comfort are not found in the things of this earth. When the things of this earth are taken away and you are tempted to despair, or filled with fear of want or even death, put your soul and conscience in order by repentance and faith. Hear and hold fast to God and His promises and be set free from the chains of fear, the lures of temptation, and the love of merely this life. The finger of God, the Holy Spirit, remains active on this earth in your life. It your Father in heaven, through the command and promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of His Holy Spirit, who works to preserve you and grant you peace.