

Sermon for Lent 3 (Oculi) Sunday - Luke 11:14-28

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

First off, that's make this abundantly clear: he exists. Let's not pretend that we go about our days in perfect peace and serenity with no warfare going on. However shocking this may seem to us, this fact must be stated. It's in the world's most important book, the Bible, in the Gospels, and even in the very words of Jesus Himself, so it must be said. We renounced him, his works, and his ways this morning. Yes, Virginia, there is a Satan.

The devil meets us as an entirely unavoidable reality. Where does evil come from in the world? How can people act as they do? Is it more reasonable to believe there is no devil? Who would know more about him than Jesus? So what does Jesus say about him? Plenty, in fact. Today's Gospel is no exception. Our Lord casts out one of Satan's demons, talks about demon possession, and teaches about how the devil's kingdom cannot stand against itself.

Our Lord often calls him "Satan." This is a Hebrew word which translates into English as "enemy" or "adversary." This is an apt description: Satan is the enemy of God who at every turn withstands God and tries to hinder His good purposes. Satan is the source of all evil in the world. From him come our evil plans and self-serving schemes. We collaborate with him more than we know. Anytime we seek our own good first above our neighbor's we have believed his lies. Satan is our enemy. Satan is also called the "devil." This comes from the Greek word "diabolos," which translates into English as "the condemner." It reminds us of another side of his nature: he accuses us before God. When he is able to manipulate us into falling away from God, he next makes it clear that we are condemned and forsaken by God. He wants us to believe that we belong to his kingdom, not God's. He wants us to believe that we are "children of the devil" and "children of evil," who do what our father the devil desires. Therefore Jesus calls him a "murderer from the beginning," a destroyer that rejoices to bring us to destruction.

From this we can also see that the devil is best imagined not literally, as some demonic figure lurking in the shadows with pitchfork and tail to boot, but as a symbol of a deep and very dark truth that is this: the evil that we and the rest of humanity experience in history is more than the sum of its parts and goes above logical explanation. The horror of the Holocaust, Christians beheaded in the Middle East, the American legalized abortion slaughter, the pornography addiction epidemic – none of these forms of evil can be fully blamed on politics, anthropology, or psychology. There is a dark spiritual force in evil from Satan as we experience it.

Here's an example: think of anyone who has struggled with a family member hopelessly caught in the downward suicidal spiral of serious drug addiction. We can analyze chemical aspects of addiction, social brokenness, despair, negative peer pressure, etc. These can tell part of the tale, but never fully explain the will toward self-destruction, rage toward self and others, and the inability to do good. We realize that our loved one is captive even beyond rational control. To blame the devil in this case is not to revert back to some pre-scientific fairytale, but to say with the Scriptures: "Our struggle is ... against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12) From the devil

comes all that creates pain that breaks down bodies and souls and communities. He makes us feel insecure, vulnerable, and that we're not good enough. It was Satan who put into the mind of Judas to betray his Master. It is he who sows the weeds among the good seed of God's Word.

That parable especially gives another clear description of Satan and just how he works. A farmer went out to sow his field with good seed. That night an enemy came and sowed weeds and then went away. When the crops came in, both wheat and weeds appeared. The servants in the parable confront the farmer: "... [D]id you not sow good seed in the field? How then does it have weeds?" Or said another way: "Where did this evil come from?" The farmer gives a straightforward answer: "An enemy has done this." The farmer, who represents God, is not the source of the weeds or of evil.

Sometimes we try to solve the problem of why God causes or allows the devil to perform his evil works. Maybe God is sending sorrow to shape our character. Maybe He placed evil in the world to make choosing good a meaningful moral decision. Maybe it's something we don't understand now, but eventually we'll see that these sufferings were part of God's plan all along. To all our faulty attempts to justify an Almighty and Good God with an evil world, the Scriptures give a resounding "No!" The cancer that takes our loved one's life, the child abused by a sex predator, the ovens in Auschwitz – these are not part of God's plan. We will not find out in the end how these events just seemed to be evil, but were actually part of the fabric of good. Did God plant these evil weeds? No! No! A thousand times no! He does not will evil, he does not cause evil, not even from His left hand. "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all."

Well, then, where did the weeds come from? "An enemy has done this" is the farmer's reply. We should realize that this is powerful good news. The devil is not only our enemy, but God's enemy, too. We're not alone in this. To the parents of wayward children, to the son or daughter standing at their father's resting place, to the parents of a stillborn child, we're not alone in this. The seeds of Satan grown up into an evil crop that has risen up to destroy our life are God's enemy, too.

Christ speaks of the devil's kingdom and likens him to a strong man who guards his household, armed to the teeth, watching over his treasures. But now the Stronger One has come and has conquered him and taken from him all his weapons. That means that Christ has redeemed us from our sins. The accuser must keep silent. Of course Satan will continue to plant evil destructions in our lives, but he knows his days are numbered. He who believes in Jesus is safe and secure. We are baptized. We are forgiven. We are part of Christ's kingdom which has no end, and where Satan is destroyed once and for all. We are not alone. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✕BJF✕