

Oculi

7 March, Anno Domini 2021

St. Luke 11:14-28

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In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The works of God are certainly incredible. Think about how shocking it would be today if Jesus were walking around healing people stricken with cancer, going into the cancer ward and emptying the beds, casting out the demons that afflict people mentally and physically? Doctors would be scratching their heads because they had deemed these poor souls to be lost causes. Look at the real nature of what Jesus is doing. This demon had been tormenting this man by silencing him. Of course, we want our medical diagnoses that we can cure with a pill, a surgery, a vaccine, a diet change, or some therapy. But we miss what's really going on, regardless of whether the affliction can be treated with medical technology. There is only one cause, one source of all diseases and afflictions - sin. And there is nothing more pleasing to Satan than to disorder God's creation, to break things, to cause suffering and pain, to destroy and bring death.

No one had been able to help this poor man. He could only suffer under the daily torment of not being able to relate his thoughts, give his opinions, speak the truth, or ask questions. The demon had him firmly bound up. Consider that. His silence was demonic - like Adam's. You were not made to be silent. You were made to talk - with one another and with God. God created you with a mouth so that you could speak with Him, so that you could pray, so that you can speak the truth of His Word, so that you can confess your sins and forgive those who have trespassed against you, so that you can fill the air with the high praises of God, so that you could sing such beautiful things as the liturgy of the Church and the majestic and comforting hymns that have been given to the Church over the ages. But too often, the devil's got our tongue. We may not be mute but we don't pray, we don't speak the truth in the face of lies, we don't read the Bible to our families, we don't defend the good name of our neighbor, we refuse to sing the praises of our Savior who shed His Blood for us. And sometimes when we should be silent we open our mouths and defame our neighbor, grumble against God, fill the air with filthy talk and coarse joking, and repeat the devil's lies. Has the devil made you mute when you should be speaking? Has he got you running your mouth when you need to be silent. What kind of a steward have you been of your tongue? It doesn't belong to you. It has been entrusted to you by God your Creator for His purposes. Are you using it for those or are you using it only to serve yourself and the devil? Those

who mouths are filled with lies and defamations, unkind words, and words of unjust condemnation are ruled by the devil and have given themselves to his captivity. Repent. Your tongue is to be a seat of holy words - words of life and blessing, words that comfort that hurting and sorrowing, words of instruction in those things which are good and beautiful and true according to Holy Scriptures, words of gentleness and protection for the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

But the strongest man has come, in great weakness and humility, and disarmed the strong devil. Jesus freed the man from his bondage and oppression. John's account doesn't seem all that fantastic but you can be sure it was an incredible moment for that poor man! Praise God who in His great compassion does such wondrous things! "See now the threatening strong one disarmed! Jesus breaks down all the walls of death's fortress, brings for the prisoners triumphant, unharmed. Satan, you wicked one, own now your master! Jesus has come! He, the mighty Redeemer!" Jesus is overthrowing Satan's kingdom of death and destruction. Jesus is undoing what sin has done to us. What is done for this man is just a glimpse of what is coming when Jesus finally and eternally conquers sin by His death and resurrection. In the waters of Holy Baptism your tongue has been loosed so that you might no longer fill it with evil. Instead, you have been set free to use it for that which it was designed - to speak the Word of God and proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to all who will hear.

This has to be the finger of God! This should cause endless amounts of rejoicing. And some did marvel. But notice how quickly and fiercely the works of God are also despised, how blasphemously the works of the Spirit are labeled themselves as demonic. This sounds nonsensical, stupid even. Why would Satan overcome himself? Why would Satan give up his territory? He wouldn't of course, not willingly. But this is the foolishness of unbelief. It is so blinded by its hatred of Jesus that it calls God's compassionate work of freeing a man from Satan, satanic! The things of God cannot be understood by those who are still of the flesh, still themselves servants of the devil. Jesus clearly said "Unless you are born from above, you cannot see the kingdom of God." Those who attacked these works of Jesus were the same ones who rejected John's Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. They weren't interested in mercy and forgiveness, the very things that define God's kingdom. They rejected John's preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand and that one already was among them who would baptize not just with water but with the Holy Spirit and give life to those trapped in death. Like hard-hearted Pharaoh, the Pharisees refused to confess what was as plain as the nose on their face - the works of Jesus were the works of God.

It was Jesus who was offensive. Think of the consequences of confessing that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God. It would mean we would have to listen to Him and receive His Word as that of God Himself. It would mean that my supposed righteousness is worthless. It would mean that the Law was never the means of salvation, that nothing I do makes me look good to God. It would mean that the desires of my flesh are evil and that I must confess that even though I am able to speak, my heart and my mind have been every bit as possessed by satanic thoughts as the mute man was. It would mean that what Jesus calls sin is sin - that living together apart from marriage is adultery, that not setting aside a day each week to hear God's Word and receive the Holy Supper is to despise God Himself, that abortion is murder, that men are men and women are women. And this is what is intolerable. Have you ever been told that what you are doing is a sin and recoiled in defense? Have you ever felt the sting of the Law and wanted to argue it and silence it rather than humble yourself before the Lord and repent? The consequences of Jesus being who He claimed to be are tremendous and this is why Satan and the world and those still lost in unbelief rail so viciously against Christ and His Church.

There is no overlap between the two kingdoms. The works of God's kingdom have absolutely NOTHING in common with the works of Satan's kingdom. It is utter foolishness to think that the ways of God and the devil can live together in harmony. They are completely and in every way opposed to one another. We are finally starting to see that this country. When God's Word is not proclaimed clearly and unequivocally from the pulpit, at the dinner table, and at the water cooler Satan's kingdom advances. And when the Word of God is proclaimed it is assailed as bigoted, anti-woman, homophobic, and intolerant. And in many cases, the vitriol is worst coming from those who would also like to bear the name of Christian. The morality of the world is utter lawlessness. That which God calls evil the world celebrates as good. And what God holds up as good, the world despises as evil, intolerant, and unloving.

It should be self-evident that which is of God and that which is of the devil, what is good and what is bad. And it is, but the unbelief of our flesh dulls and blinds us to the truth. Why else would St. Paul feel the need to list out the works of darkness? We shouldn't NEED the Ten Commandments written down and taught to us. Knowing and keeping them should be second nature. But it most certainly isn't. Rather, conceived in sin, every inclination of your heart is evil from birth. Daily we need to consider our lives in light of the Ten Commandments and see just how pleasing the will of God is to us. We shouldn't need to be told to hear and learn

the Word of God. We shouldn't need to be told to pray. We shouldn't need to be told that anger and bitterness is of Satan. But we need to be, repeatedly. We need to be warned against them and called to repentance for engaging in those things which God has declared to be evil.

It is quite an ingenious design of Satan to be able to convince the children of God, who know what is good and right and true, who have been rescued from the strong arm of Satan and freed from his kingdom of death, to then return to the very chains of death from which they have been set free. And not only return but to call it good, to try to put some kind of churchy spin on the works of darkness. It's as though we think it's one thing when the world does it, but it's totally different when I do it.

We need to beware and on our guard. The demons driven out by the flood waters of Baptism will not give up so easily. They will return with a vengeance and seek to lead us astray. The Pharisees were experts in the Scriptures and yet they couldn't see the kingdom of God standing in front of them in Jesus. They were sold under the demonic notion that mercy isn't the way or work of God. They were blinded by the delusion that they were righteous. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus because they didn't believe the Word of God which prophesied of Jesus. It is deathly important that we recognize the works that are of God and the works that are of Satan. The works of one lead to eternal life while the works of the other only drive us into the deep darkness of eternal judgment. The problem is that the works of Satan are candy-coated with happiness and pleasure and self-indulgence. They are easy and gratifying and exactly what our sinful flesh wants.

The works of God are works of mercy and peace. They are works of life and salvation. They are works that save from death, works that rob Satan of his prey, works that undo the destroying, condemning work of Satan. The chaos and lawlessness of the world, the works that indulge and exalt the desires of the self and the flesh are of the devil. The grudge-bearer who forgives, the murderer who repents, the father who protects and provides, the addict who seeks God's mercy and absolution - these are the works born of God, men's works born of God's work who drives out demons, who heals the sick and lame, who offers up the sinless life of His dear and only Son as the sacrifice for the sins of the world that hates and rejects Him. These are things the world doesn't and can't understand because it is sold under sin and does not see the work of God. It hears the Word of God and calls it evil because it loves the darkness.

You, dear children of God, have been freed from Satan's tyranny. The blinding scales of sin and unbelief have been washed away in the waters of Baptism and on that day the unclean spirit of Satan was cast out and gave way to the Holy Spirit. You no longer live under the false teaching that the weight of your salvation lies on you. You have been freed from the demonic works of self-indulgence and self-righteousness by the life-giving, redeeming, forgiving works of God. The darkness of sin and death have been scattered by the bright light of Jesus by whose Word and works the works of the devil are exposed for what they are. Here before you are the works of God. Here by water and word, by bread and wine, here by the word of proclamation, Jesus continues His work among you. Here the Lord drives out demons, breaks the chains of death, heals your diseases and promises to you eternal health and restoration on the Last Day. Here the Lord looses your tongue to so that your mouth would be filled with His praise and glory and the truth of His Word.

May God preserve His work of forgiveness and mercy among us so that we might always recognize and flee from the works of Satan who seeks only our eternal destruction. And may He always bless the words of our mouths that they be filled with His divine truth and mercy.

In the Name of +Jesus.