

Oculi

20 March, Anno Domini 2022

St. Luke 11:14-28

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

In his commentary on Luke, Dr. Arthur Just rightly says “In a world where demons roam, there are no empty houses.” You are either ruled by Christ or you are possessed and tyrannized by demons. Those are the only options. You cannot be neutral in this war. You are either walking in the light of Christ, loving God and your neighbor, restraining the desires of your sinful flesh and imitating the life of God that you see in Christ Jesus or you are walking in darkness, hating God and your neighbor, living according to your greed and your lusts and your vanity. There is no gray in-between. As St. Paul says, sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness **must not even be named** among the saints of God. God gave you your mouth so that it might be filled with prayer and thanksgiving and praise, not with crude jokes, not with gossip or slander, not with bitterness or hatred. We are to detest these things because they are vile and destructive. They aren’t harmless to you or anyone else. They aren’t funny. They aren’t allowed to you under the guise of Christian freedom. Such things are not to flow out of a heart formed by and filled with the Word of God.

If we, the baptized, live contrary to the will and command of our heavenly Father, we show that we have in fact forsaken our Father and claimed Satan once again as our lord and master. We willingly bind ourselves with the chains of sin and death and eternal judgment from which Christ had graciously delivered us by His death. We trade the Promised Land for the fleshpots of Egypt. This is no less true when we bind ourselves to the empty words of those who teach falsely concerning sin and Christ and our salvation, those who deny the grace of God given in Holy Baptism, who teach that our Lord didn’t mean what He actually said when instituting the Lord’s Supper on the night when He was betrayed to death, who teach you to look within yourself for strength and comfort and the assurance of your salvation. These are the theologically demonic offspring of the Pharisees who blasphemed the Holy Spirit and called His gracious work of deliverance the work of Beelzebul. Such have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Instead they will share an eternity of judgment with the devil and all who reject the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

You who have been cleansed by the washing of water and the Word, have been set free from the ways and works of death. You were snatched out of Satan's kingdom into which you were conceived. Indeed, you were once darkness. You once confessed the creed of the unholy Trinity - me, myself, and I. You once bowed to the wicked desires of your flesh and could only count God as your enemy. You once trusted in yourself and your own good works for salvation. But no longer! Your chains of slavery to your passions and sinful reason have been shattered by the true and only strong man - Jesus Christ. In the glorious light of His cross, the purest act of selflessness and love, all of our supposedly bright, shiny good works are reduced to a pile of garbage and we see definitively the true work of God - to rescue all who have been held captive by Satan, to forgive the sins of sinners like you and me who had no hope of redemption.

The spirit of Satan has been cast out from you and you have been made instead the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. In Him you are no longer slaves but sons. You are an heir of God's kingdom - a kingdom of grace and mercy, a kingdom of life and peace. And the Holy Spirit is at work in you every day to put to death those sinful desires which still rage within your heart and mind. It is the Holy Spirit which brings you to desire the Word and gifts of Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause you to rejoice in the truth, even when that truth makes you an enemy of the world. It is the work of the Holy Spirit which defies your selfish pride so that you do not give yourself over to your anger, to your desire to take care of yourself first, to your pleasure at seeing others suffer misfortune and failure, to your fear of hoarding God's gifts rather than pressing them into the service of your family, your church, your neighbor, and even those who hate you. It is the Spirit who wages war against your wicked flesh that it may not rule over you.

You will be tempted. Though he was driven out when you were baptized, Satan will not give up his prey so easily. He will fight for you and against you. He will fill your eyes, your ears, and your minds with temptations. He will stir up your flesh and try to lure you back into the darkness and death of pleasure and selfishness. He will work to quiet your conscience so that your sins no longer trouble you or alarm you. And when you are no longer terrified of God's judgment against your sin, you will find it easier to go without Christ's Word of absolution, with hearing the Gospel, without receiving the food of salvation which Christ has prepared for you. You will foolishly begin to imagine that you can be a Christian without the means of grace. For a while you will still claim to believe. You will make excuses why you don't need to observe the Sabbath Day, why you don't still need to gladly hear and learn God's Word, as He Himself has commanded you.

And in time you will come to even despise these things because, rather than serving as a blessing to you, they stand in judgment against your unbelief and rejection of the gifts of Christ. You will become like the Pharisees who saw the gracious work of Christ to deliver us from sin, death, and Satan and called it the work of demons. And you will die as a child of wrath, to suffer eternally your rejection of the Holy Spirit and His saving work.

There isn't a one of you gathered here who should imagine that you are not equally as susceptible to the devil's ploys and trickery. None us, not even for a moment, should imagine that we are strong, that we aren't in immediate danger. Satan and his legions are unfurling their banners all around. They are armed to the teeth and have only one purpose - our eternal destruction. And there isn't anything they won't do to crush us. Hatred is the air they breathe. Despair is their battle cry. And you are they one they want. They are strong. They are crafty. They are deceitful. They are tireless.

Flee from sin! Do not dabble in it. Do not think it will not consume you. Flee all manner of sexual immorality and perversity. Flee from anger and jealousy and envy. Flee from arrogance. Flee from covetousness and selfishness in all its forms. They will hurt you. They will hurt those around you. Guaranteed. Do not give the devil even an inch. Don't fill his armory with weapons to use against you now and in your last hour when death draws near. If you think you are strong, drop your foolish pride and take up the weapons of God. If you know you are weak, take up the weapons of God.

Behold the Lord Jesus, the only one who has the power and authority to send the demons fleeing! See Jesus who needs only to speak a word of rebuke and his enemies fall down in defeat. This Jesus is the Stronger man who has come to set you free. He has bound Satan and stripped him of his strength by freeing you from yours sins, by suffering in His own flesh the punishment which should fall to you. None remains. Satan has no accusation to throw against those whose trust is alone in Christ Jesus. It is Jesus, not you, who has conquered your enemies and He holds the battlefield. You will only lose if you put your trust somewhere else - yourself, your works, your wealth, science or reason. These cannot help you. But Christ can and has. He knows well the enemies that are lined up against you and He has come to throw them down and set you free from bondage. The Word of absolution which Christ speaks at one and the same time loosens your bonds and binds the devil. The food of Christ's Body and Blood fill your hunger for righteousness and rob's the devil of his prey.

By your Baptism, Christ has set you free and made you the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Only do not return to the Egypt of slavery and eternal death from whence He brought you. Instead of foolish empty talk, let your mouths be filled with the Word of God. Let the house of your soul, once filled with demons and darkness and evil, instead be filled with the life-giving Word of God so that faith in Christ Jesus might spring forth. Do not give Satan the opportunity to return or your last state will be worse than the first. Speak of Christ in your homes, in your places of work, with your neighbors. Join your Christian brothers and sisters and all the heavenly hosts in hymn and in prayer as we fill all creation with the Word of God and His praises. Do not be mute. Speak. Pray. Sing. This is how your own house is made the house of God. It is God's Word alone that sanctifies anything, making it and keeping it holy. This is how you turn back the charging armies of hell. They cannot stand against God's Word. They cannot stand against the Blood of Christ poured out for sinners.

God grant each of us His Holy Spirit that we may daily take up His Word and by that Word resist all of Satan's attacks and one day wear the crown of everlasting life.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding, keeps your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.