

Oculi

23 March, Anno Domini 2025

St. Luke 11:14-28

Saints of Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Faith is, by nature, not a product of the intellect or logic. You don't have faith in something you see and have evidence of. Faith, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it, "is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) We are used to thinking of faith in terms of the faith that believes what we read in Scripture to be the infallible and inerrant Word of God. We accept by faith that all of creation came about by God's divine speech in seven, twenty-four hour days because none of us were there to see it happen. We accept by faith that our sins are forgiven because we can't see them removed from us - there are no blood tests to prove that our guilt is gone.

But in today's text, Jesus encounters another kind of faith - the unfaith if you will of the Pharisees. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the Pharisees simply couldn't let go of what they believed, what they so desperately wanted to believe - that Jesus was not the Son of God, that what Jesus was doing isn't what God does. There was too much on the line - their entire way of life, their culture, and most importantly, their pride were on the line. Here was Jesus, driving out demons, freeing people from Satan's tyranny, healing every disease, and through it all, forgiving sin. So, who's this guy working for? If he's working for Satan, then the Pharisees were guilty of having the same employer because they were doing the same thing. If they admitted that Jesus was doing the works of God, then the Pharisees would be forced into the awkward position of having to believe the rest of Jesus' preaching.

Pharaoh was in this same position when confronted with the lice, the flies, the

frogs, the bloody water, and the death. The evidence was right there in front of him. The Word and finger of God were undeniably clear. His court magicians had been outdone. But Pharaoh wouldn't believe. His power and his pride were on the line. His faith in himself, his unyielding belief in what he had bound him to deny the word and works of God.

The hearts of Pharaoh and the Pharisees were bound tightly by a strong man who is never willing to yield any ground. They had faith, but in something completely different. But that is exactly what is required in a confrontation with Jesus. We cannot serve two masters. The kingdom of God means death for every sinner, but only the death of the self, the death of pride, the death of foolish wisdom and reason. And that's exactly why the Word of God encounters so much obstinacy in the non-Christian and even still in the Christian. Even though the truth is that we have nothing to lose except the chains of our slavery, a tyrant for a lord, and the constant stress and pain of self-preservation, the lies of the strong man have convinced us that our shackles are freedom and his despotism is love.

What Christ brings is a wholly different and other kingdom, governed by different rules. It is a kingdom where the loves of our flesh are exposed as deadly sin. It is a kingdom where our wisdom is called foolishness. It is a kingdom where life is found in death and victory in losing. It is a kingdom where the ruler serves His subjects. It a kingdom where love, humility, and weakness are strength. It is a kingdom of grace. And that's exactly what makes us uncomfortable. Grace makes us uneasy because grace excludes us doing our part. Grace means that God loves and forgives you without you doing anything to make Him love you or to make Him keep loving you. Grace removes any confidence that we want to take in what we have, who we are, who we have been, and what we think we know. Grace is the uncomfortably comforting truth that Jesus has rescued you from the strong man without your help, your cooperation, or even your asking.

The battle between the strong man and the stronger man continues to this day. The Lord continues to go about His work and many are those who continue to refuse to believe the works that He does. They choose instead to remain bounds by the

chains of the strong man because they love themselves and their wisdom rather than God. They refuse to believe the Word which Jesus has spoken, choosing their own ways and their own words. They see the works of Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper and they refuse to believe these are how God saves, that these are how the stronger man binds up the strong man and rescues us poor sinners from his clutches. They see these as mere empty symbols to be cast aside for more ingenious, popular, and impressive signs from heaven. And lest we grow arrogant and lazy, it's imperative that we heed our Lord's warning that the demons will return looking take up residence again. If we remain ignorant of our Lord's word, if we do not fill the void left with the Means of Grace and the tools of the Holy Spirit, we will be overrun again with demons of pride and arrogance far worse than inhabited us before.

Your eyes, however, have been opened. When you see the baptismal waters cascading down the head of another sinner, you believe what cannot be seen. You believe that those waters cast out demons and in their place God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit of Life. When you hear the called and ordained servant of the Word forgive all your sins in the Name and by the authority of the Holy Trinity, you believe what cannot be seen. You believe that just as surely as you heard those words here on earth, your sins are most certainly forgiven before God in heaven, as though Christ, your dear Lord were standing right here to speak with you Himself. When you look at bread and wine lifted up before your eyes, you believe what cannot be seen. You believe that in, with, and under those elements lie the true and actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. You believe that with that bread and wine you receive the Lamb of God who offered Himself as the vicarious atonement for your sins.

Here again today in our midst is Jesus driving out demons, freeing people from Satan's tyranny, healing every disease, and through it all, forgiving sin. Behold, the kingdom of God is among you this day to save you. May God the Holy Spirit grant us all true faith to see the work of His finger and receive them in joy.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.

