

Oculi, 2006
Text: Luke 11:14-28
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

There is a war raging in heaven and on earth, it's been going on for a long time and it will not stop until this world itself stops. You are in this war. There is no dodging this draft. There are no fence-sitters. You are either for the god of this world or you are against him. The god of this world, the prince of the air, the father of lies, Satan: all these are the names of the Strong Man about whom Jesus speaks today. His army is organized and it does not work at cross-purposes. Furthermore, Satan starts with a strong advantage: all the children born to men are conscripted into his army by nature, they are born sinful and unclean.

This was your plight, the same as St. David's: "I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Humanity sold itself into the slavery of sin and the devil long ago in that garden when Father Adam and Mother Eve made that dreadful, willful choice to try to set up shop as their own gods. But they failed – a man can be his own god as little as a horse can be his own rider. Satan knew this. He knew that by turning Adam and Eve against the true God that he would gain the place of power and authority over them. Satan won that first battle of this war. The children of Adam and Eve would be his from then on. And he is a Strong

Man and a harsh master. No one on earth could snatch the Strong Man's possessions from him – for he was well-armed and vigilant.

Yes, Satan held on tightly to his possessions, the souls of men. And the evidence of his handiwork is clear for all to see. The cruelties of the wars of the twentieth century – from gas chambers in Nazi Germany to the beheadings on Arab TV to the gang raps of East St. Louis – should have been more than enough to convince the world of Satan's existence. But the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing folks he didn't exist. For Satan gets all the fence-sitters. All those who long for a comfortable life of tolerance and non-judging are in the devil's sway. For to compromise with evil, to allow it to live and let live, is to be complicit with evil. Making a deal with the devil is almost never as exciting as a contract signed in blood. It is usually as mundane as letting it slide. Your best friend is contemplating adultery? Don't worry about that – don't warn them, it's none of your business. Folks in the church gossiping about so and so and this and that – it couldn't hurt to listen in could it? A family member has given up on coming to the Church to hear God's Word and receive his gifts – who are we to judge?

Repent. The jig is up. There is no compromise, no neutrality, no third way. One stronger than the Strong Man is here. He is the Way. He has utterly disarmed that usurper the devil. Turn away from evil and cast yourself on the mercy of this Stronger Man. He had long promised to come – indeed even on the day of that first

lost battle he said that he would come as the Seed of the Woman who would crush that serpent's head, even though his own heel be bruised with the fangs of death. Like our mighty David he came alone to do combat against the Goliath that held us captive. But he came with even less armament than David had. Not only did he not wear armor, but he carried no offensive weapon either. In fact, he came in total weakness. He came clothed in the flesh of humankind. For he came as the child of Mary, a helpless infant coming forth from that most blessed of wombs.

What luck, Satan thought, to have him like this. He tried tempting him in the desert, but that did not work. So if he could not corrupt this God in the flesh, then he would have to battle him head on. But note how oddly our Lord fights back, or rather, refuses to do so. Was there every a champion who entered single combat like this? In the weakness of human flesh he was easy prey to the devil. When the soldiers came for him in the garden, he would not allow Peter to fight with the sword. When the hate-filled Roman soldiers beat him, he turned the other cheek. When Pilate gave in to the twisted will of the crowd, even though he knew it was wrong, Jesus went along willingly. For no one had the authority to take the life of Jesus from him, but he laid it down of his own accord. Yes, the devil did his best and worst to Jesus. He spent all his rage and hatred on him, all the power he had been given was used up on the Lord. And at the end of that Friday which is called good for a reason, both champions were dead. Jesus' corpse hung lifeless on the cross, and Satan's kingdom lay as an empty shell at his feet.

And that's how Jesus healed this mute man in today's Gospel lesson. That's how he healed all whom he healed. It is how he will heal you on the Last Day when he comes to raise the living and the dead. He heals you by taking on all your diseases and injuries and imperfections. For that is what Jesus did on the cross. He was made into the sin of the world with all its consequences. He healed the weak by becoming weak. He made the mute to talk because he was about to become mute himself – for no lips are more mute than those silenced in death, no eyes are so blind as those closed in the grave, and thus he made the blind see. All the power of sin and death and all of God's wrath against them too, were poured out on Jesus. There is none of it left now. All has been made new.

For only one champion stayed dead, and it wasn't our Lord. Our Lord Jesus rose on the third day proving that God's love and mercy triumph over the devil's lies every time. You too have been brought into this resurrection of Christ in your baptism. The devil now has no claim on you. Oh, yes, he still prowls around as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour – but he still has no claim on you. As St. Paul says in today's Epistle lesson, Jesus gave himself up for you as a sacrifice to the Father – now you are given up to him. Now you have joined the Lord Jesus in this war. The Lord has drafted you out of the enemy's army and into his own. Now your real battle has begun.

Life in the enemy's camp is easy. Going along with Satan is just going along with the flow. It is being tolerant and accepting of whatever comes along. But

living the life of the baptized is swimming up stream. The life in Satan's camp is saying yes to everything. The baptized life in Christ is saying yes to the Lord and no to everything else. The world is full of temptations to lure you back to the devil's camp. Beloved, do not follow after them. Cling to your Lord Jesus Christ. So long as you do, there is no danger for you. So long as you are in Christ, that roaring lion of the devil is without tooth or claw, he can do you no harm.

Thus heed St. Paul's warnings: do not give place to sexual immorality or the idolatry of greed or foul joking. Flee this and all other evil. Fight against it and cling to Jesus. For make no mistake – you cannot be on both sides. He who is not with Jesus is against him. Our salvation comes through faith in our Lord and what did for us on the cross. But faith cannot exist without repentance. You cannot say you believe in the Lord and still cling to the devil's ways.

Surely you will stumble and fall in the heat of this battle. For you will continue to live with the results of original sin: a weakness and inclination away from the good. You will need to live a life of constant repentance, of continually lifting up your eyes to the Lord and crying out for his mercy and turning away from the sins of weakness you fall into. But be sure that you do not walk into open and willful sin. As St. John says, there is a sin that leads to death and there is a sin that does not lead to death. The everyday struggle we have against our sinful weakness is the sin that does not lead to death. But the willful, deliberate, intentional sin that looks God in the eye and says, "I know you don't want this, but

I don't care. I'm going to do it anyway" – that sin will soon lead to eternal death because that sin will soon kill your faith and drive the Holy Spirit away.

So, listen to St. Paul. He says that you must "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to do according to his will." He says, "with fear and trembling" because we are still in enemy territory out there in the world, battling behind enemy lines. The devil still wants to drag you down to hell. But the Scriptures also tell us never to despair. For in Christ your salvation is secure. He has not left you helpless in this world. By the finger of God he also cast out your demons in Holy Baptism. He will continue to hold you in his care. He has forgiven your sins great and small and will shelter you from the devil's assaults. Cast your cares on him. Trust in him. Cling to him. And there is no surer way of clinging to him than in coming to receive him in his Holy Supper. Come most of all if you are weak and worried and fearful. For no devil can abide the presence of Jesus. Here, in his own body and blood, he offers you forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Here is strength for battle weary saints. Here is eternal life, for here is Jesus, our Champion, our Redeemer, our Savior.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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