

Oculi, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 11:14-28 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelze-bul, the prince of demons," ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ²⁴ "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first." ²⁷ As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" ²⁸ But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 There's no such thing as a half-Christian. There's no fence-sitting, no neutrality, no not choosing sides. If you will not be on the side of Christ, you are already on the side of the devil. The Lord's words in today's Gospel reading leave no middle ground: whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. It's the same warning the Lord Jesus delivered to the Laodiceans: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:15-19).

2 There is war going on. Whoever is not with the Lord is against Him. Even those who are with the Lord may depart from Him, may fall away from the faith delivered to them. Woe to those who have their children baptized but who have no intention of seeing their children

continually filled with the Word of Christ. Everyone at birth belongs to the devil, but Holy Baptism is an exorcism, a driving out of the devil. Having been driven out in Holy Baptism, the devil seeks an opportunity to return. And when he comes, if he finds the house swept and put in order, he comes back seven times stronger. And the last state of a person is worse than the first. The only way to keep the devil and all his wickedness away is continually to be filled by Christ, through His preached Word, through Absolution, and through His Body and Blood. Woe to parents and woe to sponsors who shirk their promise to ensure ongoing Christian instruction.

3 Woe to those who suppose that by avoiding all manifest evil they may remain Christians. But they indulge their lustful thoughts, permit words of gossip, harbor hearts of pride, and place their own needs above the needs of spouse or children. There is no middle-ground, says St. Paul. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...but sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them" (Eph 5:1-7).

4 "What is the true cause of this conduct? It so happens that all such without suspecting it belong to the devil's kingdom; he does not permit them to see that fundamentally they are still enemies of Christ, enemies of His grace, His Word, His kingdom, His Church, His believers. The devil holds them captive in his net; they do his will. He deceives them most shamefully. God says: either completely mine or not at all; leave the devil completely and join Christ, that is the way to do it. The devil on the other hand, gladly permits his subjects to be a half-Christian, be somewhat pious, do this or that good work; for then he has them more securely in his power. Such half-Christians are the most unfortunate of all the devil's subjects, because they are

secure; they suppose that they lack nothing; they are going the correct middle road, and they therefore always live in the delusion that they are members of Christ's kingdom. But they go to hell with their imagined faith" (Walther, 120).

5 Woe to those who want to go the middle way, who want both their vices and the faith the Lord delivers. Woe to those unwilling to leave houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or lands for the sake of following Christ. Woe to those who, having been made children of God through Holy Baptism, grow to despise His word by refusing to hear it or to despise the Lord's Body and Blood by refusing to receive them. There is no fence-sitting, no middle ground, no lukewarm living, no half-Christianity. Repent.

6 The devil's kingdom is united. Whoever is not with me, Jesus says, is with my adversary, the devil. The devil is the strong man about whom the Lord warns. He comes, fully armed, and takes residence in those who belong to him. He guards his own palace, his goods are safe, or so it seems. That is, of course, until the Stronger Man came to plunder the devil's kingdom. Who is the Stronger Man? He who was born of the Virgin, who was as weak and frail as any human baby, He is the Stronger Man. He who was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, as one from whom men hide their faces, He is the Stronger Man. The One accused by the crowds of driving out demons by the power of the devil, He is the Stronger Man. The Stronger Man is stronger in weakness, in humility, in shame. He is strongest in His death.

7 The One who drove out demons, who made the mute man speak, Jesus Christ, is the Stronger Man. He came to destroy the kingdom of the devil, to bind the strong man, to pillage his kingdom, to snatch from his control the Lord's elect. He broke the strong man's power. On the cross, when the Stronger Man Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, the kingdom of the strong man the devil was left hollow and broken.

8 By driving the devil out at your baptism, the Lord has made you a part of His kingdom. He has driven the demon out of your house and filled you with Himself instead. There's no

middle ground, to be sure, and being in the devil's kingdom is remarkably easy. But there's nothing as easy as being in the Stronger Man's possession. There's nothing you need to do. He claims you as His own, and then He causes you to dwell in Him. He provides His Word which causes demons to run. He sends ministers to speak His Holy Absolution which sends them fleeing. And He graces you with His very presence on the altar, which is enough to send them packing. And then when He fills you with Himself, when He places His Body in your mouth, when He sends His blood coursing down your throat, the demons don't stand a chance. They cannot dwell in His presence. You are with Him because He has delivered faith and sustains you with His precious Word and Sacraments.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville