

## Oculi, A ✕ D 2010

### Luke 11:14-28

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Some things are either black or white. There's no room for grey, no in-between. You can't be a little bit pregnant or a little bit married. Nor can you be partially dead. When Jesus was casting out demons and the crowds marveled, the Pharisees and scribes murmured, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons, Beelzebul." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." There is no middle ground. Either Jesus is your Savior or your enemy. 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. Either you are a Christian or not.

2 There is no more a half-Christian than there can be a half-husband. Those who contend, "I believe in God, but I don't need to be where He delivers His gifts" are like a husband who says "I believe in my wife, but that doesn't mean I need to go home to her at night and eat the meal she has prepared for me. She knows I love her. I can love her when I'm out with my buddies or even in the arms of a lover. She's still my wife." Nonsense. You cannot reject the Lord's gifts, His Word and Sacraments, and suppose to be a Christian. To reject the gifts is to reject the Giver.

3 There's a similar danger for parents who suppose they can have their children baptized and then break their vows to ensure the child is brought to the services in the Lord's house and instructed toward faithful reception of the Lord's Supper. Baptism is an exorcism, a driving out of the devil. Through Baptism, the Lord Jesus continues to drive out demons, to sweep the house clean and evict the strong man Satan. Jesus is the Stronger Man, who through Holy Baptism and the preaching of His Word binds the strong man and casts him out of the house. Then, driven out, the devil doesn't return while the house is still occupied but waits for the Stronger Man no longer to occupy the house. If you keep your children or yourselves from the place where God delivers His faith-creating, faith-sustaining gifts, eventually the Stronger Man Jesus will have departed. And when the devil finds the house empty and swept clean, he returns seven times more powerfully. And the last condition of those baptized who depart from the faith is worse than before.

4 There is no such thing as a half-Christian, no way to love both Beelzebul, the devil, the world, or your sinful flesh, and Jesus, your Savior. A kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. You cannot remain both in Christ and in your sin. "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." No middle ground. No half-Christians.

5 Blessed Dr. Walther, the first president of the synod, preached, ""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). Repent.

6 Dangers abound, to be sure, but the comfort is that the Pharisees were wrong. Jesus drove out demons not by the power of Satan but by the finger of God. Satan's kingdom is undone. Jesus' power to bind the strong man and to drive him out of the houses, the people, he occupies flows from the power He displayed on the cross, a power over death yet hidden in death. 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.

7 It's not up to you to avoid being a half-Christian anymore than it's up to you to make yourself a whole Christian. You can do neither. 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. Jesus 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 causes them to flee. 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.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer