

9.3.2017 Trinity 12 (Mark 7:31-37)

From the 1950's through the 1990's, Paul Harvey's radio programs reached as many as 24 million people every week. In 1965, he broadcast a segment called: "If I were the devil." He presented updated versions of this message several times over the years. This is one of those versions:

"If I were the devil, if I were the Prince of Darkness, I'd want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I would have a third of its real estate and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn't be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree, thee. So I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. I'd subvert the churches first. I'd begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: 'Do as you please.' To the young I would whisper that the Bible is a myth. I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what is bad is good, and what is good is 'square'. And the old, I would teach to pray after me: 'Our Father, which art in Washington.' And then, I'd get organized. I'd educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I'd peddle drugs to whom I could. I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I'd tranquilize the rest with pills."

"If I were the devil, I'd soon have families at war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves, until each in its turn was consumed. And with promises of higher ratings, I'd have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. If I were the devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellects but neglect to discipline emotions - just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you'd have to have drug-sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door. Within a decade, I'd have prisons overflowing. I'd have judges promoting pornography. Soon I could evict God from the courthouse, and then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for

religion and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls and church money.”

“If I were the devil, I’d make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were the devil, I would take from those who have and I would give to those who wanted, until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. And what will you bet I couldn’t get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich. I would caution against extremes in hard work, in patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on the TV is the way to be. And thus I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure. In other words, if I were the devil, I’d just keep right on doing what he’s doing.”

This segment from Paul Harvey accurately expresses the truth that the vast majority of people greatly underestimate the influence of the enemy in the world around us, and in doing so allow his deadly schemes and temptations to go relatively unnoticed. Popular culture has reduced Satan to a cartoon character with a pitchfork who occasionally shows up on a person's shoulder to offer bad advice, but in truth, he is the greatest enemy we face. Holy Scripture tells us that he is “*the god of this world*” who has “*blinded the minds*” of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Bible describes him as “*a liar, and the father of lies*” (John 8:44), “*a murderer from the beginning*” (John 8:44), and one who “*as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). Scripture is clear, Satan is far more than a caricature of some relatively harmless evil. He is the ultimate source of every lie and the one who perpetuates so much fear, suffering, and sorrow in this earthly life.

In our Gospel reading this morning we heard the story of Jesus miraculously healing a man who “*was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech*” (Mark 7:32). In this man’s afflictions we see a small glimpse of the human suffering that can be traced back to the work of our enemy. Every problem crippling humanity, from the diseases and

disasters of this fallen world to the temptations we face today, it is all a result of that first whisper in the Garden of Eden. The blinded minds of the unbelieving world won't make that connection, because they view Adam and Eve as legend or myth, but we must connect our own disordered desires and the trials and sorrows of this world to the Original Sin of our first parents. We are the "offspring of Adam" (Article IX), and as such by our own fallen human nature we are too often inclined to listen to that seductive voice that opposes God and leads to sin. It is vital to recognize the truth that through a subtle whisper our first parents were led to turn their back on their Creator, allowed their trust in Him to die, and freely chose to place themselves before and against Almighty God.

This connection to our first parents, through the generations, is one our enemy doesn't want us to recognize. His goal is to seize the ripest apple on the tree. His desire is our eternal separation from God, our utter destruction, and this destruction is easier to accomplish when we don't identify him and his schemes (that our first parents fell for) as the source of all sorrow, sickness, suffering, and death. The Bible tells us to "*submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7). This is one reason why our enemy does his best to hide his presence in the history of mankind and in our personal lives. He knows that if we don't recognize him or his plan to harm us, we won't resist. He goes to work hidden in the shadows, and remains under cover because doing so serves his purposes.

Our enemy disguises his presence and lurks in the darkness, but the "*Light of the World*" (John 8:12) "*shines in darkness*" (John 1:5), and Scripture tells us that the reason the Son of God appeared was to "*destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8). In today's Gospel we see Jesus destroy the work of the devil through a miraculous healing, by making this deaf man to hear and giving him the ability to speak. The passage reveals that when the crowd witnessed this miracle "*they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak*" (Mark 7:37). The crowd was overjoyed, but consider what these verses reveal about what

Jesus experienced at the time of this healing. The reading tells us that He took the man aside from the multitude, *“and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened”* (Mark 7:34).

What is the significance of Jesus sighing immediately before healing this man? Think about the Gospel reading two weeks ago, where Jesus *“beheld the city”* of Jerusalem, and before cleansing the Temple of the many evils that were taking place there, He *“wept over it”* (Luke 19:41). Consider the fact that before Jesus raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, when He saw how many people mourned, and the way Mary and Martha grieved the death of their brother, *“Jesus wept”* (John 11:35). Our Savior has the power to destroy every evil work of the devil. He even has the power to raise the dead, yet the eternal truth of His victory over sin and death does not prevent our Lord from sighing, from weeping, from feeling great sorrow at the sight of how His children suffer. The day will come when the devil will be *“cast into the lake of fire and brimstone”* and *“tormented day and night forever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10). The day will come when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, *“and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Revelation 21:4), but until that day, Jesus walks with us. He says, *“Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you”* (Matthew 11:28). Our Lord shares our trials and sorrows.

The fact that God knows your pain (Exodus 3:7) and shares in your suffering (Isaiah 63:9) is one of the most comforting truths contained in the pages of Holy Scripture, and we come to a greater understanding of the miraculous nature of that truth when we consider the fact that we are creatures, and He is the Creator. As we sing in Morning Prayer, *“It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.”* Consider the distinction between the creature, and the Creator. We are finite, He is infinite. We are imperfect, He is perfectly Holy. We are powerless to save ourselves, He is all-powerful. We are broken, and yet, incredibly, *“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted”* (Psalm 34:18). He promises us, *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you”* (Isaiah 43:2). His Holy

Word assures us that nothing *“shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:39). Almighty God could have detached Himself completely from our sorrow and pain, but instead He chose to enter this broken world. In the Person of Jesus Christ, God not only chose to enter this world, He chose to do so as a baby born in a manger. The *“KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”* (Revelation 19:16) didn't grow up in a palace, but in the humble home of a carpenter, and when speaking with His disciples, the only-begotten Son of God made it clear that He *“came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45).

In His mission to redeem the people of God, our Lord held nothing back, He didn't insulate Himself at all - not even from death. In every sense of the word, Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us. The kingdom of Heaven is at hand, and if I were the devil, I would hide in the shadows as well.