

3.20.2022 Lent 3 (Luke 11:14-28)

When we read the Gospel accounts, we notice opposition to Jesus intensifies with every step He takes toward the Cross. At the beginning of His ministry, the curious religious leaders seem content to observe our Lord from a distance, but with every *sign* and *wonder* He performs, His popularity among the faithful crowd grows, and the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees begin to view Jesus as a threat to their power, and to their nation. In time, the curiosity of the Jewish religious leaders turns to hatred, and as you know, this hardening of their hearts eventually led them to have our Lord arrested, turned over to Pilate, charged as a threat to Roman authority.

The Gospel passage we read this morning provides us with an account of one of the many times Jesus confronted these religious leaders. The confrontation we read about today began, believe it or not, because our Lord miraculously healed a man, setting him free from physical and spiritual bondage. The Divine, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, by the power of His Word, cast a demon out of a man who couldn't speak, and the crowd that witnessed this miracle responded as you would expect, they *marveled*, they were utterly amazed.

The crowd, the common person, the poor, the sick, the suffering, those who, like us, were searching for hope and deliverance recognized that these signs and wonders performed by our Lord pointed directly and definitively to Him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In exercising His Divine power over spiritual darkness, the assaults of the enemy, and the devastating effects of our sin, our Savior Christ was clearly revealing to His own people that He was in fact the promised Messiah, the very Son of God.

The hopeful crowd recognized the signs that the kingdom of God had come, but the hard-hearted scribes and Pharisees who vehemently opposed our Lord would do everything they could to discredit Him. By this time Jesus had made the blind see (Matthew 9:27-31), the lame walk (Luke 5:17-26), and the deaf hear (Mark 7:31-37). He had cleansed lepers (Luke 5:12-14), raised the dead (Mark 5:21-24), and preached the Gospel to the poor (Luke 7:22). Now, once again, by His Word, He had performed a miracle that couldn't be denied, and because of that fact, the religious leaders were desperately trying

to find a way to prevent the people from believing that Jesus was “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16).

In desperation they came up with the irrational and insulting accusation against our Lord that He was casting out demons by the power of Satan. Notice again that these men don’t attempt to deny the miracle occurred, they couldn’t argue against that fact, and so instead they try to tear down the Miracle Worker by putting forth the ridiculous argument that this miraculous healing, which was true and good and beautiful was accomplished by the power of the enemy. Their claim, this charge against our Lord is absurd, illogical, and Jesus immediately refuted such nonsense by stating this fact. He said, “*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?*” (Luke 11:17-18).

Our Lord’s response to these men is grounded in the truth that in the universe there is a great war being waged between God, the source of all goodness (St. Augustine), and the evil forces that oppose Him. As St. Paul wrote, “*We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Ephesians 6:12). In this war the everlasting life of the soul hangs in the balance, and because both sides recognize the gravity of that truth, there is no middle ground in this conflict. Neither the kingdom of God, nor that of the enemy, is a house divided. When Jesus speaks *the Word* and a soul is healed (Matthew 8:8), it is a clear and definitive victory for God. Such life-giving miraculous work cannot come from the enemy, for he “*comes only to steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10).

“*Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.*” Jesus spoke those words to refute His enemies, and in doing so, He revealed the truth, to use the words of St. John, “*that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5). Our Lord is not a house divided, and in the Epistle we read this morning we find St. Paul exhorting Christians to follow the perfect, absolutely undivided example of holiness that Jesus sets for His people. In that passage St. Paul calls us to “*Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us*” (Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV). Like a little boy or girl

looks up to, and wants to imitate every good thing about their mom or dad, by the grace of God our desire, as *beloved children* of God, must be to imitate every good and perfect attribute of our Father in Heaven.

As *imitators of God*, we seek to do good and avoid evil, and as St. Paul states, we do good by walking “*as children of the light... in all goodness and righteousness and truth*” (Ephesians 5:8-9). We avoid evil by turning away from those serious sins he spoke of in this passage. You may have noticed the way he emphasized the importance of avoiding evil by repeatedly exhorting Christians to turn away from sin. Speaking about such evil St. Paul wrote, “*let it not be once named among you*” (vs. 3), later he stated, “*Be not ye therefore partakers with them,*” (vs. 7), and finally he told us to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness... For it is a shame even to speak of those things...*” (vs. 11-12).

St. Paul is so emphatic in this call to do good and avoid evil because he knows that when we, the *beloved children* of God sin, we are like a house divided, *and a house divided against a house falleth*. You can't courageously stand up for Jesus on Sunday, and sit in fear of our post-Christian culture on Monday. You can't be a citizen of heaven, and a slave to this world. You can't “*serve two masters,*” for either you will “*hate the one, and love the other,*” or else you will “*hold to the one, and despise the other*” (Matthew 6:24). Our Lord and God is not a house divided, and as His disciples we must strive for the same singularity of purpose.

The Epistle and Gospel passages we read this morning, in different ways, point to the same Truth, and Jesus used these words to state that Truth in the Gospel, He said, “*But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you*” (Luke 11:20). *The kingdom of God is come*. Our Savior Christ made the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear. He cleansed lepers, raised the dead, and preached the Good News to the poor. He claimed to be the Divine Son of God who came to die as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and He backed up that claim by walking out of His own tomb. The Gospels present us with the Truth of who Jesus was, and is, and will always be, and the Epistle we read exhorts us to respond to that Truth, in the words of St. Paul, to “*awake... rise from the dead*” (Ephesians 5:14), and to act on what you have seen and heard *in all goodness*

and righteousness and truth.

The words we heard this morning are meant to teach us something about who Jesus is, about a war being waged in which eternity hangs in the balance, about the fact that there is no middle ground on this battlefield, no kingdom divided in this conflict. We are meant to learn something from what we heard today, but more than that, we are meant to become something because of what we heard today. By the grace of God may we do so. May we become *imitators of God, as beloved children, may we walk in love, as Christ loved us, and, as He gave Himself up for us, may we give ourselves up to Him as a living sacrifice for the world He loves and gave His life to save.*