

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

We don't actually know very much about demons, and most of what we do know is from the New Testament. We know that they are real, they are malevolent, and they are powerful. But we also know that they are extremely limited; they are creatures, not the creator. St. Paul calls them supernatural powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness, but they melt before God's word as if they were never there.

Today's gospel, Satan is described as a strong man well equipped who trusts in his equipment, but Christ is stronger. He takes away that equipment that Satan trusts in with a word, and it is done, it is over. We are the plunder that belongs to Christ by right that is stolen by Satan. Christ buys us back at his own expense, paying with his blood. The battle is completely one-sided, and Satan never had a chance, yet it is still costly for the Son of God.

At the time of the incarnation, there is a flurry of demonic activity. There are even a few occasions where the demons seem to inhabit people and to some degree control them, speaking through their voices, and throwing their bodies around. Although even in the time of the incarnation, we would do well to realize that even this is limited, that even these demon-possessed men and women are not completely under the control of the demons. The demons are not in complete control; they are not able to accomplish what they desire. They try to cast the boy into the fire, but it doesn't quite work, and the boy survives. They do not have complete control.

They are also recorded as directly afflicting people with physical ailments. In today's gospel, a demon has rendered a man unable to speak. For the most part, however, demons seem to be more about influence rather than control. That certainly seems to be all that they were allowed to do before Christ became a man. There are no instances of demons possessing and controlling a person or a demon being cast out in all of the Old Testament. And I suspect that is the case once again since the time of the resurrection.

Nonetheless, demons are real, and we will all and do face demonic activity. However, God never allows his people to be tempted beyond their strength. God promises the means to overcome

Satan with his word. St. Peter writes, "Be sober, be vigilant b/c your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all Grace who has called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect establish, strengthen and settle you." and St. Paul writes "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, take the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one". And James, the brother of our Lord, promises that if we submit to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Demons are definitely obstacles to our faith, a threat b/c if given the chance, they will destroy our faith and our bodies. They are real, they are malevolent, and they are powerful; they are more dangerous than a rabid dog, but they are on a very short chain. Christians should respect the prowess and malice of demons, but we should not fear them. No Christians should fear God and trust in Him.

Demons need not occupy huge amounts of our attention and study. They are a defeated army and have been for a millenium. But what they try to do is of interest. It shows where we are seen as weak and it shows what they fear. Much can be learned from how Satan tempted Eve in the garden, and she failed. Just as much can be learned from the temptation of Jesus and his victory.

With the mute, we do not learn demonic tactics, how he is tempted or how he is afflicted, but we see the demonic goal. This is what the demons desire for us. They want us to be mute, b/c with the heart man believes and with the mouth he confesses. They do not want us to confess Christ, to praise his name or to witness to his gospel. They also do not want us to speak for the unborn, or of the injustice of judging men and women to be racist simply upon the basis of their skin color.

If either of those statements made you uncomfortable that this sermon was veering away from theology and into the realm of politics, and the church should remain silent on these matters. I would say the demons are gaining ground. They color morality as merely politics. They say we cannot and must not use theology to judge all of life, but only a small segment of it and that is a part we should

keep private. Don't bring your religion into politics, they say, don't bring your religion into the world. Keep it at home, keep it at church.

They want to make us mute on a myriad of topics so that the whole world might be deceived. And to our shame we have all succumbed to this temptation or some version of it from time to time. We have been afraid that if we spoke out loud about what the bible says about touchy topics such as fornication or tithing, that our children would withdraw their affection from us, that we would risk a promotion at work, or our friends and neighbors might think we are judgmental, bigoted, or sexist.

Driven by those fears, rather than the fear of the Lord, we have become mute when we should speak. We have not acted in love for our neighbors, but in self-interest and cowardice, to avoid conflict.

If ever there was a time when the world needed Christians to speak the truth out loud, when the world needed the gospel, it is now. Let us not be cowed by the demons and their human agents. Let us live up to the name of our baptism, let us confess Christ and praise his name, witness to his gospel, in season and out of season, in public, often and without apology. The demons do not get to decide what is theological and what is political. For the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.

At the end of today's reading, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

An important part of keeping it is speaking. Let us hear the word of God and speak it. Use it, praise it, confess it, and spread it. In all of this and at all times God is faithful. The demons have already been defeated; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. You should not look at the history of Christianity to the martyrs of the faith and think, "I could never do what they did, I would crack under the pressure". So would they! If they were left to their own devices and not inspired by the Spirit. God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able. He makes a way of escape for you in the person of his Son. That is the point of the crucifixion, he bids you follow him out of slavery, escaping the clutches of the satan and the world and your sinful flesh by forgiveness.

In Him and by Him you can, and you will bear temptation, slander, and persecution. Just as your fathers in the faith did before you. Because God is with you and will not abandon you. He who has called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus will perfect, establish, and settle you. He will open your mouth to speak, before kings and before men that Jesus lives. The shield of faith will quench all the darts of the wicked one.

In heaven, there are no mutes. Only those who speak and confess the blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

✠ In Jesus name. Amen ✠