

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear hearers, there are three in number which seek your overthrow—three beings or forces which seek to turn you away from God and the grace He has for you in Christ and the work Jesus did in His ministry and ultimately in His dying on the cross and rising again from the grave. These three use any means possible, drawing from their own resources, to lure you away from the truth and into the lie that leads to death and eternal damnation, to the place prepared for the devil and His angels. (cf. Matthew 25:41)

The first, as pointed out by Jesus in today's Gospel, is the devil. He, as Jesus calls him, is the father of lies. A quick glance back to the beginning would prove this. There, after Adam and the woman were in the Garden, the devil entered a serpent who lured the woman to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:1b-5)

The woman took some of the fruit, ate of it, gave some to Adam, he ate of it, too. And they didn't drop dead on the spot. It would seem as if the serpent told the truth. But, as we get to Genesis 5, we read, "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died." (Genesis 5:5) It should go without saying that the woman, who by this time was given the name Eve, preceded or met her husband, Adam, in death.

"You will not die," the devil says. "And he died," the Scriptures declare of Adam.

This was not the way it was supposed to go. Man was supposed to walk forever in the presence of YHWH. Adam and Eve were created to live forever with their descendants in the Garden of Eden, spending their days living from the providence of the God who created them. But it was not to be, as the serpent came in, tricked them, and they fell into sin and death. And so, as Jesus calls the devil in today's Gospel, he is a murderer, bringing death upon mankind.

That is the way of the devil. He twists and perverts the Word of God to suit his own purposes. He lies, and continues to lie, purporting to say something that sounds like the Word of God, even drawing from the Word of God, but turning it in upon himself and toward you, making it say something it doesn't say, to lure you away from God and to himself and the fate that awaits him.

You know the consequences of this, even as you suffer them yourself. You know good and evil, and you turn toward evil; St. Paul puts it in words for you in Romans 7. You suffer injury and violence. You must bear illnesses and disease. You grieve the death of loved ones, and loved ones will grieve your death. "[J]ust as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12) "[B]y the one man's offense many died..." (Romans 5:15a) "[B]y the one man's offense death reigned through the one..." (Romans 5:17a) So long as death reigns over you thanks to the lie of the Great Deceiver, your fate is the same as his and his angels.

Sin, death, and the devil—these are your lot in this life, and this is but only one of the three who work against you.

The second force which seeks your overthrow is the world. It works in concert with the devil, as the devil has his sway over the world. But be not fooled, the world belongs to God and His Christ. He has the power to stay the devil's hand (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6), so He has the power to control the world, and He uses all that the devil and the world might throw at you for your good, though we may not understand that in the here and now.

The devil lies, and the world seems to confirm the lie. Again, look back at Adam and the woman in the Garden. They eat the forbidden fruit and do not die on the spot. Their lives according to the world did not end; they lived another day. Yes, eventually, they died, but as far as their now fallen worldly wisdom was concerned, they were still living, and they imagined that they were like God, knowing good and evil.

Of course, the evil consumed them as they consumed the fruit, and they thought themselves in control of their lives. This is the way of the world: corruption, self-centeredness, and shame. Shame—God takes His walk in the cool of the day, and in shame did Adam and the woman hide themselves, because they were naked. Oh, it's not that they weren't clothed, though that's certainly true, but their intentions—their worldly lusts—were present for the other and God to see, and they were ashamed.

You know the way this goes. You suffer the afflictions of the world all the time. It's the plight of being a Christian on this side of eternity. You proclaim Christ in word and deed as much as your fallen flesh will allow, and you are ignored for it, told to shut up, ridiculed and mocked, and in some cases tortured and persecuted. Well, you may not be on these shores, but your brothers and sisters in Christ around the world and in days past certainly were. The way of the world is to look out for self-interests, often at the expense of others.

And that brings us to that third person: YOU! We often refer to it as the "sinful flesh" or "Old Adam," but it is you. And he works right along with the devil and the world. The devil tells the lie, the world confirms the lie, and you fall for the lie.

You might as well be the one who reaches up to grab the fruit and take the bite yourself. "Oh, I wouldn't do that," you might say. That, dear hearers, is the typical response of the sinful flesh. Sinners never take responsibility for their actions. You, sinner that you are, never take responsibility for your sins.

Look at your father and mother in Paradise: Adam blames the woman, and the woman, in turn, blames the serpent. And in the divine justice of God, not a one of them gets off without punishment. All of creation is cursed, Adam is cursed, the woman is cursed, the serpent is cursed—and Adam and Eve eventually die, this world—this cosmos—will be destroyed, even as it flooded in the days of Noah, and the devil will be cast into everlasting fire.

You, too, dear hearers, are under the same curse. You are under the spell of the devil's lies, you go right along with the world, and you bear in you the mark of Old Adam, your father, through whom sin came into the world, came to you. You are a sinner who deserves death, who deserves to be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

That is the truth that is before you—the reality that you must face. Blame others all you want, blame God who gives all things and others to you, you are the guilty one for your sins, and the sentence for your guilt is death. This is the Word of the Lord.

But it is not the end of His Word. I mentioned the flood, earlier, where the world was utterly destroyed with days of rain and the springs of the deep bursting open. The chaos of the scene must have been unbearable—torrents of water coming from all directions, thunderous sounds and water crashed into rocks and out from the rocks, uprooting trees and bursting down buildings, the wailing from the people and animals who were not on the Ark as they struggled for breath and drowned amidst an ever-rising deluge of God's wrath.

But in the Ark there was safety. In the Ark there was God's grace and mercy. In the Ark there was God's providence. In the Ark, in the midst of death and chaos and unholiness, there was life and divine order and the holy presence of YHWH. What separated the world outside of the Ark from that inside? Very simply, Jesus Christ!

The eight souls were saved by grace through faith in the promise made to the serpent as the woman and Adam were expelled from Paradise: "I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15) These eight trusted that God would keep His promise to make all things right, to make all things new, and they emerged from that floating church to the re-creation of creation and gave thanks to God.

Is it any wonder, then, that the place where you now find yourselves sitting is called a nave? It stems from the same Latin root from which is derived the word navy. You, dear hearers, are floating in the Ark of the Church amidst death and chaos and unholiness that is beyond these walls.

Out there is death—you cannot find eternal life beyond the walls of the Ark of the Church; but in here there is life because YHWH and His Christ are present here to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation. Out there is chaos—it's a dog-eat-dog world you live in; but in here there is divine order because YHWH and His Christ are here to give and you receive, a picture of the paradise to come. Out there is unholiness—the world is perverse and corrupt and unclean; but in here there is holiness because YHWH and His Christ are here to make you and all things new. In here is celebrated the truth that Jesus Christ will return to make all things new as He says in St. John's Apocalypse. (cf. Revelation 21:5)

That promise is taken on faith because Jesus has come once already, suffered all that the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh could throw at Him, and for it suffered the full wrath of God for creation...for you. "I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me." He has taken your sin from you, that which you inherited thanks to Adam's eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and that which you have added thereto from your own eating from that tree—the sins you have committed. Jesus took these from you completely; they are no longer yours—and He died. Adam and his descendants died thanks to sin, as Genesis 5 recounts, and because of your sin and sins and all sin and sins, Jesus the Christ died.

His death is your death. Because Jesus died, you are spared the death that is due the devil and his angels in the everlasting fire. Jesus bore the full wrath and fire of God against sin for you, and you died with Christ. For, as St. Paul wrote, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death..." (Romans 6:3-4a) You, by way of water and the Word, were joined to Jesus in His death. There, in Holy Baptism, your Old Adam was drowned as the evil world was drowned in the flood, and you were saved—you are saved. You have died with Christ; therefore, since you have died, you have been freed from sin. (cf. Romans 6:7) Now, just as Jesus was raised by the glory of the Father, even you, dear Baptized, are made to walk in newness of life.

And so, because of Jesus, St. Paul wrote

But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:15-17)

Death is of the devil, the world, and your Old Adam. Baptism now saves you. (cf. 1 Peter 3:21) In baptism, you died to sin with Christ. You are a new creation; behold, Jesus makes all things new. You are now in life, prepared for the new world to come, through the merits of Jesus Christ, your Savior. "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." Yes, you may yet taste of death before Jesus returns, but by His grace, you are kept in Jesus Christ, your Light and your Life, through whom your death is but the gateway to everlasting life, and is not everlasting torment and death in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25-26) Because you are kept with Jesus Christ, you hold to His Word—you are held to His Word of life—and you will never see death. This is the truth. This is your reality. This is the promise you trust and hope for. This is yours, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.