

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

The advancements in modern technology and western medicine are terrific gifts from God. What man is able to accomplish and know thanks to the available technology today cannot compare with what man had done and known in the past, though it is hubris to think that things would be where they are now without the work and knowledge of the past. And with regard to modern western medicine, the drugs and treatments for various ailments have turned what once were thought to be death sentences into conditions that can be cured and recovered from in a matter of days in some cases, and certainly treatable and livable in many others. In fact, I would not be surprised to hear of a treatment in the coming months that would alleviate the symptoms of and improve the mortality rate for this new Covid-19 disease—and, in fact, I have heard that work is underway attempting to accomplish just that!

However, these advancements have also increased the doubt and skepticism of those who spend their entire lives living with these luxuries. In fact, it has turned any talk of demons and demon-possession into myth and fantasy. That which was at one time thought to be the work of demons is now, by-and-large, seen as a disease or syndrome that can be cured or treated with a pill or injection. Now, I can grant that a great many conditions so treatable or curable were at one time confused for demon-possession, but I'm also not so naïve as to discount the work of demons masquerading as a medical condition or that demon-possession can also be confused for some sort of medical condition.

Discounting the work of demons is nothing new to fallen man. You see that in the words of some of the people who witnessed the exorcism that Jesus performed in today's Gospel reading. "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." Now, you can gauge by Jesus' response to them that they had accused Jesus of being a demon or in cahoots with the demons in order to put on a good show. It's the kind of thing that some televangelist healers pulled off on their miracle shows: a plant in the audience that would fake an injury or illness and would be miraculously healed for all to see—the supposedly lame walking, the supposedly deaf hearing, the supposedly blind seeing, etc. In any event, these people doubted the validity of the work of demons in their midst, consequently, that Jesus was really casting demons out.

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? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

No, what Jesus was doing was serious business. He wasn't a snake-oil salesman or sleezy televangelist. He was really casting out demons, pronouncing the wrath of God on those minions of the devil and the grace and mercy of God to those who were under their possession. And, as it turns out, these exorcisms, like all of his miraculous works and signs, pointed to Him as the promised Messiah, and especially to His work on the cross.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) This is the curse that God spoke on the serpent as Adam and the woman were cast out of the Garden of Eden. It's called the *Protevangeliium*, a fancy word which means *first gospel*; so-called because it prefigures the death of Jesus on the cross, whereat He ultimately and forever crushes the serpent's—read, the devil's—head, or authority, over creation.

It is by way of Jesus' crucifixion, by the spilled blood of the Lamb, that Michael and his angels defeated the devil and his angels in the war that broke out in heaven. (cf. Revelation 12:7-12, especially v. 11) It was at the crucifixion that Jesus crushed the devil's head. Consequently, it is by way of His crucifixion that Jesus cast out the demons during His ministry. It's not that the devil never was the Lord's devil, as you may recall from the sermon two weeks ago, but that the victory over the devil at the cross was the ultimate blow to any thought, dream, or desire that Satan might have had to conquer the world and turn all of creation against God.

Now, the devil still tries his best to turn man against his Creator and Redeemer. That's the reason for the woe you hear in Revelation after the devil and his minions are cast to earth: "But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" That's the reason for the warning you hear from the pen of St. Peter: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) But you are armed with the Word of God to combat the devil and his angels, just as the Word of God incarnate did. You are armed with the truth that the devil is an enemy defeated at the cross. And though devils all the world should fill, though the devil may rage and scowl, one little word can fell him: liar. (cf. [A Mighty Fortress is Our God](#))

I'm convinced that the devil is still at work, masquerading himself in all kinds of ways available to him, not the least of which is all of the luxuries with which the modern world lives. Whether that's diseases or knowledge or what-have-you, the devil still works to deceive you. He has myriad more subtle ways to do so, and, I'm sure, has no problem not outwardly receiving the credit for the falling away from God of anyone. "We are more enlightened than they were centuries ago—we know better than to call this the work of demons and that the work of some god," they may say, and the devil is all-to-pleased to have the company.

That's the world's stance on all of this: devils and demons are myths and fairy tales. But Jesus has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33)—He is crucified, dead, buried, risen and ascended. That's the devil's take on all of this: he lies and deceives in order to turn you from your God and devour you. But Jesus has crushed the serpent's head—He is crucified, dead, buried, risen, and ascended. But there's still that sinful flesh of yours.

To how much are you willing to be subjected for your belief in the existence of demons? For your stance that demons are still at work in this world? For your confession that the devil still prowls around seeking to devour even you? The world will hate you for all of this, and likely the more you speak about the devil and demons, the more the ridicule will increase. It's nothing new. Jesus was mocked for his work against the demonic, as evidenced in today's text. So, you should expect nothing different. And, you should not be afraid to keep quiet about these things. Jesus cast out demons; they are real, and they are dangerous—and the mocking and ridicule can be too much to bear for the sinful flesh.

If you're willing to budge on this, it could easily lead to budging on any number of doctrines of the faith. In fact, as the world considers the devil and demons myths and fairy tales, so it also does with God and His Christ. If you want to keep silent about the devil and demons and their evil work, how hard would it be to convince you to keep silent about God, His Christ, and the salvation and victory He has won on the cross?

That silence is the work of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh.

Thankfully, God has giving you armor and the weapon with which to stand against that evil triumvirate, and they all center on the cross of Christ.

[B]e strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against

the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God... (Ephesians 6:11-17)

The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, as shoes the readiness given by the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God—these are your arms and defense against the world, the devil, and your sinful flesh. The truth is that demons are real, and so is Jesus, who has conquered them in the fight on the cross. The righteousness that is yours is yours by way of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, given to you for His sake. The gospel of peace is that while once you were enemies of God, in Christ and His shed blood you have been reconciled to His Father and yours. Faith is that which trusts in Jesus and His merits for your salvation. Salvation is the fact that you are saved, that is spared the wrath of God that is due the devil and his demons. And this is declared to you and to the world in the Word of God. Against these no devil can stand, be he alone or with seven of his friends.

That Word of God declares to you that your sin is taken from you by the Son of God and was crucified with Him on Calvary. From there, by the work of the Spirit, begun as the Word is declared to you and you were baptized, and continued in you as you continue to hear the Word of God, you are sanctified, made holy, for the sake of Christ. It is all His work, and done because of God's great love for you. The Spirit is at work in Christ to change your likeness into His likeness—He is crucified, dead, buried, risen, and ascended.

So, while demons and the devil continue their evil work in this world, you have the Word of God and His means of grace and gifts. His Word and means of grace have the power to cast the devil and his demons out, and through them, Jesus is still at work doing just that and forgiving sins and healing all manner of diseases by His Word, means, and gifts, which very well include those advances in technology and western medicine, certainly gifts from God. But it is in the Word of God and His means of grace that the kingdom of God is present. In your hearing of His Word and use of His means, the kingdom of God comes upon you; in fact, by them you are placed in the kingdom of God. And it is in this kingdom of God that you hear these miraculous words: you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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