

Have you finally stopped getting drunk? Have you finally stopped cheating on your taxes? Have you finally given up your personal pornographic harem? Have you finally given up your gossiping? If it is “yes” that can be good. But who cleaned up these things for you? Did God the Holy Spirit do this through His working upon you through His Word? Or have you just made a resolve to get rid of these vices and follow certain pious adjustments in your living?

Dr. Luther once said: *“Good and pious works never produce a good and pious person; but a good and pious person produces good and pious works.”* (Walter L&G, p. 306) We are celebrating today the festival of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church Militant and His miraculously saving work among us. By His gracious working in you, He has made you to be a good and pious person in Christ.

The wisdom of the world would insist that it is the good and pious works that make the person good and pious. If that is what you are counting on, you remain in your sin and the best you can do is trick your neighbors. Your sin is real and needs to be dealt with, but the One, the only One, who can deal with it effectively and eternally, is the Spirit. So Christ has gifted His Church with His Spirit. Let us rejoice over this great gift, by singing Hymn #399, please rise.

[Jesus said to His detractors:] "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest, And make our hearts Your place of rest; Come with Your grace and heav'nly aid, And fill the hearts which You have made." Amen. [(LSB 499:1) Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, 1737]

In Christ Jesus, who gifted you His Spirit and is greater than all other spirits combined, dear fellow redeemed:

Satan is not interested in the "waterless" places, but in the water saturated ground, the hearts of the baptized. He fervently desires to reclaim that lost ground. As believers in Christ, you and I are his prime targets. While the War has been won for us by Christ Jesus our Savior, the post war skirmishes still wage on and will until the day our Lord Jesus returns. So as we review the ongoing work of sanctification among us by the Spirit keep this in mind: **The Kingdoms of God and Satan Battle for Your Soul.**

## I

Jesus' detractors in our text were accusing Jesus of being in league with Satan and thus had the power over demons and the ability to drive them out of those possessed. Logically it makes no sense, since as Jesus pointed out - a kingdom divided against itself

will fall. But Jesus had a much greater power than Satan and demons. He used the all-powerful finger of God, an expression in Scripture, which means the Holy Spirit.

In Luther's rite of Holy Baptism, he retained the ritual of exorcism, which the Roman church had been practicing for many centuries. We still have a vestige of it in the Rite found in our Hymnary. It is when the pastor makes the sign of the cross both over the head and the chest of the person being baptized prior to the actual baptism. So in a sense we could say the person being presented for baptism remains yet for a brief moment the place swept clean with Satan and his kingdom driven out, but awaiting the filling of the Holy Spirit through the washing of water with the Word.

Remember how Jesus told His believers that they would do greater works than He had done because He was ascending to the Father where He would pour out His Spirit in full measure? We have recorded about ten demon-possessed people that Jesus exorcised throughout the Gospel accounts. But imagine the countless number the Apostles alone would baptize during that first Century. Combined on Pentecost itself they were responsible for baptizing 3,000 almost 250 each on one day! Jesus' Church on earth has been doing this work in ever increasing numbers for two millennia.

Every time you witnessed a baptism in your lifetime the finger of God, the Spirit was at work driving out Satan and his kingdom, but all you saw was a wet hand applying water and heard a mouth speaking. You could be as dense as Jesus' detractors who sought after more signs not recognizing what great work Jesus was about doing in His battle against Satan and his kingdom in the hearts of others. In Jesus' day there would be a dramatic *before and after* behavioral change in the demon possessed person who was exorcized, but for you and me today we usually do not have any perceptible behavioral change that takes place with the newly baptized. All we have to go on is the promises of our Lord in regard to what baptism does – driving out Satan through the washing away of sins in Christ's blood and clothing with the garment of Christ's everlasting righteousness.

## II

This has happened for you my fellow redeemed. "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." So you also are marked as prey to the roaring lion, who seeks to devour you, to win back the ground of your soul to claim as his own territory once again.

Satan wants you to think you have put things spiritually in order for yourself, forsaking the powerful working of the Spirit

begun when you first believed in Christ as Savior. Satan has his ready made expressions out there to entrap you: *"I have given my life totally over to Jesus"*; *"I have invited Jesus into my heart"*; *"I can look back on my life and see two sets of footprints walking on the sands of my life"*; *"I have developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ"*. To turn us inward developing a spiritual self-reliance is a goal he wishes us to pursue.

But on the other hand the devil also desires to have us take for granted the free and full forgiveness given to us through the working of the Spirit in the name of Christ Jesus our Savior. Taking this for granted he wants us to make the gradual turn toward gross sin imagining what our Lord has given us is a license to sin all we want.

Whether it is spiritual self-reliance or sinning with impunity, the devil tricks us into grieving the work of the Spirit among us. Since we retain a head-knowledge about who Jesus is and what He has done, we can so readily cut ourselves off from receiving the gracious working of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament bringing to us Jesus and giving us of the blessings He won for us to make us right and holy before the Father in heaven.

The battle for your soul is not a big noisy affair with blood and gore. Satan knows how to wage the war in a calm and peaceful setting leading you astray subtly. You can conclude that your house

is all tidy, neat and clean, standing back with your hands on your hips satisfied with yourself no longer daily repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ alone for all you need for life everlasting. You are warned by Jesus about these demonic tricks in our text, not to frighten you but for you to recognize the finger of God. The Holy Spirit, which drove Satan from His throne of dominance in your heart, continues to work as promised through the hearing of the mighty living Word of God.

In Rite II after the sermon we acknowledge this gracious work by singing with David part of Ps. 51: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, And take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *with Your free Spirit.*”

The Apostle John writing to his Christian readers at the close of the first Century said: “Little children, you are from God and have overcome (the evil spirits), because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Notice John recognizes that you, my fellow believers, have overcome the kingdom of Satan, but then proceeds to point out how this was done. Done, not by your cleverly devised works and actions, but by the Work of the Holy Spirit “who is in you” AND “is greater than he who is in the world”, namely, Satan.

Is your house swept clean and put in order? If yes, and accomplished by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, you are safe. Satan will not be allowed to reenter your soul. But know that the battle continues to wage on. Let the Spirit do His work unhindered by you according to the prescribed means of the Lord of the Church who sits at the right hand of the Father. Amen.