

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In today's text, we find Israel sitting at the base of Mt. Sinai, two months after crossing the Red Sea.

God has already cut His covenant with Israel and thundered down His 10 Commandments.

They had sworn that they would be His people and would obey every word that He spoke to them.

They had offered peace offerings, recognizing that the Lord had made peace with them.

Then Moses took half of the blood of the peace offering and threw it against the altar.

The other half he used to sprinkle the people of Israel to seal the Lord's covenant with them.

Then the Lord called Moses up the mountain and left Aaron in charge of Israel.

40 days Moses was there talking with God; a month and 10 days he was absent from them.

What was he doing? He was receiving from God all His instructions for His holy people's lives,

for how Israel would remain His people, through holy living,

that is, living in faith that their God was the One true God who would redeem them,

living as those set apart from the rest of the world according to God's laws of purity,

and living by the sacrifices God gave them to make atonement for their constant sin.

This sets the scene for our text...

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

And [the Israelites] said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ...

But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, "O Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people, whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ... Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self," And the Lord relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen ^(John 17:17)

What a mess, right?! So whose people were they?

Only 40 days after vowing to be the Lord's people, the Israelites were already interested in following after other gods, gods of their own making, giving idols credit for their deliverance from Egypt.

St. Paul reminds us that **what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.** ^{1Corinthians 10:20}

So it would appear that they were the devil's people.

Aaron—Moses' brother who is left in charge—he tries but utterly fails to keep them with the Lord.

He was in a pinch. The people called upon him to **make them gods to go before them.**

He wants them to remain as the Lord's people, but fears the people will roll over him.

So he makes them **1** idol, instead of many. And he calls that idol "the Lord."

But the people don't care what he calls it, they excitedly offer up their gold for it

and worship the product of his craftsmanship, rising up early even to worship it.

But what does Jesus warn: **Whoever is not with Me, is against Me....**

God doesn't seem to want to claim them anymore.

The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

It is as if God had forgotten, after only 40 days, that He said they were His **treasured possession among all peoples... and [would] be to [Him] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**

And Moses wouldn't claim them as his people, either.

(You'll remember that Moses, on this very mountain, had turned down God's command to lead Israel, and not just once, but multiple times, before God strictly sent him.)

...

Boy, was Jesus right when He told the Jews that **a kingdom divided against itself is laid waste.**

That's exactly what was going on here.

The devil, easily able to influence the sinful natures of God's people, turned them against God.

Even Aaron's compromise was fine with the devil... potentially even better

because it had the guise of the truth in it to tempt those who wanted to remain in the covenant.

And with Aaron sanctioning it, this would lend it some credibility.

How quickly they turned against their Redeemer.

But what was the devil doing here? He was the strong man trying to guard his own house.

The Lord had swept in and taken them from him out of Egypt.

You could see the Egyptian's polytheism already having a strong hold on the people.

They didn't just want one god, they wanted many to go before them.

These 40 days were like what Jesus spoke about when the demon is expelled from a person,

he goes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none returns to his original host,

and finding his life in better order, takes more demons and possesses the man.

When God cut His covenant with Israel, the devil was expelled.

The Lord had given Israel His 10 Commandments to order their lives by.

But while Moses was with God, the collective desire of Israel was easily swayed by the devil,

and indeed **the last state of that person is worse than the first,**

because they had had a clear revelation of the one true God, yet they were now rejecting Him.

Beloved children of God, ^{Eph.5:1}

This is what happens to God's people when they forget their identity as His baptized children.

We may marvel at how quickly, how boldly, and how obviously they disobeyed the 1st Comm., but we fare no better.

When we act as the world acts, or think as the world thinks,

yet believe that we have sanctified such thoughts and actions, we have set up such an idol.

When our lives and attentions are so divided that attending to God's Holy Things

as we do in the Divine Service is "just something else that we need to do,"

we have set up not just one, but multiple gods.

When we do not meditate on the sacrifice for our sins, the suffering and death of Jesus Christ,

or hunger and thirst for the body given for our peace or the blood of the new covenant,

then we hunger and thirst for something else.

When our own pleasure is one of our chief goals, rather than a life of self-sacrificing service, we have **sat down to eat and drink** idolatry with the Israelites.

When we, as children of God, give our eyes and hearts over to the **sexual immorality, the filthiness, foolish talk, or crude joking** ^{Eph.5:3} that is so prevalent in the world, we **rise up to play** with them.

But remember St. Paul's warning in today's Epistle: ^{Ephesians 5:1-9}

...Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

As baptized children of God, the devil wants you back.

He seems to be the only one in this text that actually wants to claim Israel.

He doesn't mind sitting at the base of Mt. Sinai, so long as he can undermine God's kingdom and divide it from within, burdening people's consciences... or hardening them.

He wants to **deceive you with empty words**,

so that you may be **sons of disobedience** so that **the wrath of God** may come upon you.

But while Moses would not claim Israel as his own, he reminded the Lord that they were His. that the Lord had taken them out of Egypt with a mighty hand;

that the Lord's reputation was on the line if He couldn't get the Israelites to the Promised Land;

that the Lord had sworn by Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel about their descendants.

Moses, here acts as Israel's mediator. He does not desire to see this kingdom of God divided.

He does not wish to see satan, "the accuser," strong arm the Lord.

And so Moses acts as Israel's savior. Here he foreshadows one greater than himself.

He serves as a picture of the **one true mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...** ^{1Timothy2:5-6}

For it was Jesus Christ who worshipped no God, but the Lord.

Who allowed no covetousness, lust, or idolatry to enter into His heart,

but shared in perfect love all that the Lord had blessed Him with;

Who allowed no filthiness or crude joking, no deceitful, empty words to cross His lips,

but spoke the truth of God in love for all;

Who sought not His own worldly pleasures,

but suffered in sacrificial service to all men, giving up His body and soul to the **wrath of God**, to be punished as the only **son of disobedience**.

Who has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won you from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver,

but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death. ^(Explanation to 2nd Article)

Jesus is the **stronger one** than satan, who overcame that evil foe, and has divided his spoil, gladly claiming and sealing you as His own, promising by Himself never to forget or forsake you.

As a baptized child of God, you are united with God; you are an heir of His kingdom,

of everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

^{1Peter2:9}

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession.

He is a jealous God and has jealously fought for your salvation.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria