
We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now [Jesus] was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ...

But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "...Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters." ...

As He said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "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!" (ESV)

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

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

In this season of Lent, we are reminded of what Martin Luther called "the unholy trinity":

the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature.

And today, we see all three in action.

Jesus cast out the mute demon (that is, the devil's minion).

Part of the crowd, representing "the world", displayed itself as

"**some**" taunted that His power came from **Beelzebul, the prince of demons**

and "**others**" tested Him, seeking more signs.

And the sinful nature showed itself as the woman voiced her beatitude, "Blessed is... Your mother," which interrupted Jesus and would have caused a distraction from His teaching.

But through it all, we see our Lord and Savior's perfect responses.

This is a great comfort for us who constantly struggle against these enemies each and every day,

because He gives us the answer to the struggle,

not merely by His setting us an example for how to get out of such struggles,

but by His triumphing over our enemies for us, on our behalf.

And we see Him deliver, protect, correct and bless His people.

...

As Jesus had done many times before, when the mute man was presented to Him

with compassion for him, He cast out the demon and the man was able to speak again,

to praise and worship Him for His deliverance.

And the people marveled and wondered at Jesus' power over the demonic forces,

recognizing that while those possessed by demons prove powerless against them,

with only His words Jesus is able to cast them out and they must listen to Him.

Just as Jesus had taught His disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of the chapter,

Jesus had **delivered** this man **from evil**, and **from the evil one**.

The "**stronger man**" had come and **attacked** and **overcome** the "**strong man**" and **took his spoil**.

The previously mute man was no longer the possession of the devil.

But the world, rather than rejoicing in the mute man's new found freedom,

shows that it is in league with Satan and is itself demon-possessed.

This is made clear by their unwillingness to marvel at Jesus' power & mercy in freeing him from Satan and in their blasphemous opposition to Him, calling His deliverance an act of the devil. And there were **others** seeking yet another sign from heaven to prove Jesus' source of power. ...If they could not accept this sign, what sign would satisfy them?

But Jesus protected His people from these blasphemous and, frankly, illogical attacks from the world. He not only stood up to the accusations and defended the truth, He also exposed the demonic sources of their deceptive attempts to disregard Jesus. Jesus said, **Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.** He is rather clear that no one is or can be neutral in the spiritual battle. If the Holy Spirit does not reside in you, then you are in the possession of Satan. Remember: Jesus spoke of the demon going out of a man and then returning to find him swept and put in order, but uninhabited by God. Unprotected and alone, that man was reoccupied by the demon with 7 more demons.

This is not to pit a Christian against the unbeliever, for without God's grace we would still be in the devil's possession. And as St. Paul says, **we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,** Ephesians 6:12 **against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil.** Again, there is no neutrality in spiritual matters. Either one is possessed by and serves the Lord, or he is possessed by and serves the devil.

... And while Jesus is teaching these important truths, He is interrupted by a woman from the crowd who says something very pious sounding, but distracting from the conversation. It's almost as if she didn't want to hear Jesus continue His current thought on this separation between God and the devil, and so tried to redirect the conversation by speaking a beatitude directed at Mary, Jesus' mother. This is not to say that what the woman said was wrong. Jesus doesn't say this, either. [Mary was indeed blessed to be the chosen vessel to carry, bear, nurse, and teach the Son of God. As she sang in her "Magnificat" "**from henceforth all generations shall call her blessed.**" Luke 1:48] But Jesus corrects the woman's attention & redirects her (and everyone else) back to the issue at hand.

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

The blessedness that we should seek after is not after a calling that none of us could ever attain. — There is only one natural, biological mother of Jesus. Instead, we are to seek after the blessedness of being possessed by the Holy Spirit, a blessedness that comes through the hearing of God's Word and receiving the Sacraments. This gives the reality of eternal blessedness...

And truly, many have been so blessed. They have heard the gracious words of forgiveness by their Savior. Satan and his minions have been expelled from them as they received Holy Baptism and the Triune God came to dwell in them and the Holy Spirit took possession of them.

Many have even received the Lord's body and blood and communed with God.
But not all those who have been so blessed have remained so blessed.
Many have not kept and guarded this treasure and cherished it, but have simply let it go.

But are we any better?

Just because you are here gathered today,
does this mean that you never are distracted from Jesus' words as the woman was?
Does it mean that the devil can't be attacking you with your guilt?
Or that the pressures of the world aren't weakening you to give in to their pressures?
No, we must ever stay vigilant and watch and pray, as Jesus reminds us.

...

The word translated here as "keep," is actually the same word previously translated as "guarded,"
as in how the **strong man... guards (keeps) his own palace**.

Note the zeal of the devil:

He does not allow Jesus to waltz in and take his spoil, but strives to keep it at all costs.
He must be attacked, his armor taken away, and he must be overcome before finally losing you.
This is the kind of zeal that we are to have as well.
that you guard and keep God's Word and Sacraments as so dear to you
that the devil would have to overcome you and pry them from your cold, dead body.

But, of course, if you guard and keep God's Word and Sacraments and use them to your blessing,
then, in reality, you are guarded and kept by God's Word and Sacraments
as your indwelling heavenly Father *guards and keeps YOU from all evil*, (SC: 1st Art. Explain.)
as the Son has already redeemed you and has, by a tree (the cross), overcome the one
who previously had overcome by a tree (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil),
as the Holy Spirit gathers you with the saints into communion with the Lord,
and enlightens, strengthens and preserves you to stand up under the attacks.

Understanding this then turns the guarding and keeping from a chore, to a great blessing,
as you hold on to Christ's forgiveness for your distractedness,
for the times you have given in to the unholy pressures of the world,
and the times when Satan has overcome you when you tried to fight him back without Jesus.
It is *to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them*,
that by the patience and comfort of His holy Word you may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life. (Collect of Thanksgiving for the Word, Form II, ELH p. 86)
and live in the peace Jesus made between you and His Father.

Then the devil and his attacks will not overcome you,
the world will not deceive you away from Christ,
and your own sinful nature will be drowned and die with all its sin and evil lusts.
And before your body becomes cold in death,
your Lord will have gathered you in to His eternal blessedness, to be and remain with Him,
in His kingdom forever.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria