

Epistle and Gospel Sermons for the Third Sunday in Lent

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Exhortation To Be Imitators Of God

Eph 5:1-9

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon

the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

1. This is a letter of admonition, instructing Christians, according to the plan underlying Paul's epistles, not to become sluggish and careless, but by their deeds to evince their faith, and honor and proclaim the Word he has taught them; for the sake of the gentiles and unbelievers, that these may not take offense at the doctrine of Christ.

2. To begin with, having shown that we were made children of God through Christ, he admonishes us to be followers, or imitators, of the Father, as beloved children. He employs the most endearing of terms – "beloved children" – to persuade us by the Father's love to love even as we are loved. But what manner of love has God manifested toward us? It was not simply that love manifest in the fact that he gives temporal support to us unworthy beings in common with all the wicked on earth; that he permits his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust and sends rain on the grateful and on the ungrateful, as Christ mentions (Mt 5, 45) in connection with his command to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Not only thus did God love us, but in a special way: he has given his Son for us. In addition to showering upon us both temporal and eternal blessings he has given his own self; he has completely poured out himself for us, with all he is, with all he has, with all he does, – and we were nothing but sinners, unworthy creatures, enemies and servants of the devil. More than this would be

beyond even his grace and power. He who despises such glow of love, which fills all heaven and earth and is beyond all power to comprehend it; who does not permit this love to kindle and incite in him love for his neighbor whether enemy or friend – such a one is not likely ever to become godly or loving by such measures as laws or commandments, instruction, constraint or compulsion.

3. "Walk in love," counsels the apostle. He would have our external life all love. But not the world's love is to be our pattern, which seeks only its own advantage, and loves only so long as it is the gainer thereby; we must love even as Christ loved, who sought neither pleasure nor gain from us but gave himself for us, not to mention the other blessings he bestows daily – gave himself as a sacrifice and offering to reconcile God unto ourselves, so that he should be our God and we his children. Thus likewise should we give, thus should we lend, or even surrender our goods, no matter whether friends claim them or enemies. Nor are we to stop there; we must be ready to give our lives for both friends and enemies, and must be occupied with no other thought than how we can serve others, and how both our life and property can be made to minister to them in this life, and this because we know that Christ is ours and has given us all things.

"To God for an odor of a sweet smell [for a sweet-smelling savor]."

4. This expression Paul takes from the Old Testament. There the temporal sacrifices are described as being "a sweet-smelling savor" unto God: that is, they were acceptable and well-pleasing to him; but not, as the Jews imagined, because of the value of the work or of the

sacrifices in themselves. For such thoughts they were chastised by the prophets often enough. They were acceptable on the ground of the true sacrifice which they foreshadowed and encircled. Paul's thought is this: The sacrifices of the Old Testament have passed. Now all sacrifices are

powerless but that of Christ himself; he is the sweet-smelling savor. This sacrifice is pleasing to God. He gladly accepts it and would have us be confident it is an acceptable offering in our stead. Moreover, there is no other sacrifice the Christian Church can offer for us. The once-offered Christ alone avails. Although, following his example, we

present our bodies a sacrifice, as taught in Romans 12, 1, yet we do not do so in behalf of ourselves or others; that is the function of the one sacrifice alone-Christ. Therefore, all sacrifices offered in the mistaken notion that they avail for us, or even secure forgiveness of sin, are wicked and unsavory. But more of this elsewhere.

Sins Not To Be Named Among Christians

”But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becometh saints.”

5. In naming uncleanness in addition to fornication, the reference is to all sensual affections in distinction from wedded love. They are too unsavory for him to mention by name, though in Romans 1, 24 he finds it expedient to speak of them without disguise. However, also wedded love must be characterized by moderation among Christians. While there is a conjugal duty to be required by necessity, it is for the very purpose of avoiding unchastity and uncleanness. The ideal and perfect condition, it is true, would be cohabitation with a sole view to procreation; however, that is too high for attainment by all.

6. Paul declares that the sin he indicates should not be named of the Ephesians. Unquestionably, among Christians there will always be some infirm one to fall; but we must labor diligently, correcting, amending and restraining. We must not suffer the offense to go unchallenged, but curtail and remedy it, lest, as remarked in the preceding lesson, the heathen stumble, saying: ”Christians tolerate such vices themselves; their conduct is not different from our own.” An occasional fall among Christians must be borne with so long as right prevails in general, and such things are neither tolerated nor taught, but reproved and amended. Paul gives the counsel (Gal 6, 1) that the brethren restore the fallen in a spirit of meekness; and he blames the Corinthians for not reprovng them who sin. I Cor 5, 2. A sin, once punished, is as if the sin did not exist; it is no longer a matter of reproach.

7. Likewise with covetousness: we are to understand it is not to be named of Christians. That is, should one be covetous, should one defraud another or contend with him about temporal advantage, as evidently was true of the Corinthians (I Cor 6, 1), the offense must not be suffered to go unreprieved and uncorrected. The Gospel must be carefully upheld and preserved among the multitude, ”that our ministration be not blamed.” 2 Cor 6, 3. I make this point for the sake of those who, so soon as they observe that all Christians are not perfectly holy, but will occasionally stumble and fall, imagine there is no such thing as a Christian and the Gospel is impotent and fruit-less. Just as if to be a Christian meant the mountain already climbed and complete, triumphant victory over sin! The fact is, it is rather a contest, a battle. Wherever there is a contest, or a battle, some of the combatants will flee, some will be wounded, some will fall and some even be slain. For warfare is not unaccompanied by disaster if it be real warfare.

8. The writer of the epistle goes on to assign the reason why it does not sound well to hear such things concerning Christians – because they are saints and it behooves saints to be chaste and moderate, and to practice and teach these virtues. Note, he calls Christians ”saints,” notwithstanding that in this life they are clothed with sinful flesh and blood. Doubtless the term is not applied in consequence of their good works, but because of the holy blood of Christ. For Paul says (1 Cor 6,

11): "But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." Being holy, we should manifest our holiness by our

deeds. Though we are still weak, yet we ought duly to strive to become chaste and free from covetousness, to the glory and honor of God and the edifying of unbelievers.

"Nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting."

9. "Filthiness" – scandalous talk – is unchaste language suggestive of fornication, uncleanness and carnal sins. It is common in taverns and generally found as accompaniment of gluttony, drunkenness and gambling. Especially were the Greeks frivolous and adepts in this respect, as their poets and other writers attest. What Paul refers to in particular is the lewd conversation uttered in public without fear and self-restraint. This will excite wicked thoughts and give rise to

serious offenses, especially with the young. As he states elsewhere (I Cor 15, 33), "Evil companionships [communications] corrupt good morals." Should there be any Christians forgetful enough to so transgress, the offense must be reproved; otherwise it will become general and give the congregation an ill repute, as if Christians taught and tolerated it the same as the heathen.

Foolish Talking And Jestng

10. By "foolish talking" is indicated the fables and tales and other lore in which the Greeks particularly abound – a people who possess a special faculty for fiction of this sort. Similar are the tales commonly related by our women and maidens while spinning at the distaff, also those which knaves are fond of relating. Here belong also worldly songs which either relate lewd matters or turn upon slippery, frivolous themes. Such are "The Priest of Kalenburg," "Dietrich of Berne" and innumerable others.

declamations in rhyme, have found vogue. Similarly the festivals commemorating the three holy kings, the passion of Christ, Dorothy and other saints were characterized.

11. Particularly unchristian is every kind of such buffoonery in the church when men are gathered to hear and learn the Word of God. But the practice is common where many come together. Even where at first things of a serious nature are discussed, men soon pass to frivolous, wanton, foolish talk, resulting in a waste of time and the neglect of better things. For instance, on the festival of Easter, foolish, ridiculous stories have been introduced into the sermon to arouse the drowsy. And at the Christmas services, the absurd pantomime of rocking a babe, and silly

12. In this category should also be classed the legends of the saints and the confused mass of lies concerning miracles, pilgrimages, masses, worship of saints, indulgences, and so on, which once dominated the pulpit. Yet these falsehoods are too gross to be called merely foolish. They are not just frivolous lies merely destructive of good morals, such as Paul refers to here, but they completely overthrow faith and the Word of God, making sainthood impossible. Such kind of jesting is altogether too serious. Those, however, who have seen into them treat them as lies of the same frivolous and abominable character as the fables or old women's tales mentioned by Paul I Tim 4, 7. But while the latter are mere human tales which nobody believes, which no one will place reliance on, serving as mere occasion of merriment, without becoming a source of general moral corruption, an obstacle to improvement and

a cause of cold, indolent Christianity, the falsehoods of the pulpit are diabolical tales held as truth in all seriousness, but a comedy for the devil and his angels.

13. "Jesting" has reference to those conversational expedients which pander to gaiety in the form of scandal; they are called among us banter and badinage. Laughter, mirth and gaiety is their purpose, and we meet with them generally in society and high life. Among the heathen, jesting was counted a virtue, and therefore received the title "eutrapelia" by Aristotle. But Paul calls it a vice among Christians, who certainly may find

conversational expedients of a different kind, such as will inspire a cheerful and joyous spirit in Christ. True, Christians are not all so pure but that some may err in this matter; but the Christian Church does not command jesting, nor suffer any member to abandon himself to the practice. It reproveth and prohibits it, particularly in religious assemblies, and in teaching and preaching. For Christ says (Mt 12, 36) that at the last day men must give account of every idle, unprofitable word they have spoken. Christians should be a very firm, though courteous, people. Courtesy should be coupled with seriousness, and seriousness with courtesy, according to the pattern of the life of Christ supplied in the Gospel.

"Which are not befitting."

14. Paul apparently would include in the catalog all unprofitable language of whatever name. I would call those words unprofitable which serve not to further the faith nor to supply the wants of the body and preserve it. We have enough else to talk about during this short lifetime, if we desire to speak, enough that is profitable and pleasant, if we talk only of Christ, of love and of other essential things. The apostle mentions the giving of thanks. It should be our daily and constant employment to praise and thank God, privately

and publicly, for the great and inexpressible treasures he has given us in Christ. But it appears that what is needful is relegated to the rear, while objects of indifference are brought to the fore. Now, mark you, if Paul will not tolerate banter and suggestive conversation among Christians, what would he say of the shameful backbiting which is heard whenever people meet, though but two individuals? Yes, what would be his judgment of those who in public preaching clinch and claw, attack and calumniate each other?

Fruitless Christians Are Heathen

"For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

15. Hereby he declares in dry words that the man who does not exhibit the fruits of faith is a heathen under the name of a Christian. Here is absolute condemnation in a word. The whoremonger is a denier of the faith; the unclean person is a denier of the faith; the covetous individual is a denier of the faith: all are rebellious, perjured and faithless toward God.

Paul tells Timothy (I Tim 5, 8): "But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." How could he utter anything more severe, more terrifying? He begins, "For this ye know." In other words: Doubt not; do not find vain comfort in the thought that this is a jest or an aspersion. A Christian name, and association

with Christians, will count for nothing. It will profit you as little as it profits the Jews to be Abraham's seed and disciples of Moses. Christ's words (Mt 7, 21) concern every man: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." There must be performance; faith must be manifested by works.

16. If the great fire of divine love which he uses as his first argument will not draw us, then may the terrible threat of hell fire prove a sufficient incentive. In other words, if men follow not God, walking in love and showing their faith by their deeds, let them know they are not God's children, not heirs in his kingdom, and therefore are unquestionably heirs of the evil one in hell. He who is unmoved by the threats of hell fire must truly be a stick or a stone; indeed, he must have a heart like an anvil, as Job says.

17. The writer of the epistle passes unusually severe sentence upon the covetous man, for he calls him an idolater, or a worshiper of a false

God. Plainly, Paul entertained special enmity against the covetous, for in Colossians 3, 5 he defines this sin in a similar manner. His reasoning, I judge, is this: All other sinners turn to use what they have and make it subservient to their lusts. Fornicators and the unclean make their bodies serve their pleasure. The haughty employ property, art, reputation and men to secure honor to themselves. The unhappy idolater alone is servant to his possessions; his sin is to save, guard and preserve property. He dare not make use of it either for himself or for others, but worships it as his god. Rather than touch his money, he would suffer both the kingdom of God and of the world to perish. He will not give a farthing to the support of a preacher or a schoolmaster for the sake of advancing God's kingdom. Because he places his confidence, his trust, in his money rather than in the living God, whose promises concerning ample support are abundant, his real God is his money, and to call him an idolater is entirely just. And, in addition, he must renounce heaven! A shameful vice, indeed! O contemptible Unbelief! what a dangerous vice art thou!

Deception By Empty Words

"Let no man deceive you with empty words."

18. This applies to those who gloss their unchastity over, as if it were but a trivial sin. And some have been even such vulgar teachers as to consider no unchastity evil except adultery, and to accept it as a normal function, like eating and drinking. The Greek philosophers and poets were of this class. And Terence says, "It is neither a sin nor a shame for a youth to commit fornication." To obey such doctrine would be to know nothing of God and to live in the lust of concupiscence, like the gentiles who know not God, of whom we heard in the preceding lesson. All arguments of this character are vain words; they may fascinate the reason after a fashion; yet they are vain and futile, unable to profit their authors. Covetousness likewise has much false show and glitter. When one defrauds another or seeks his own advantage

to the injury of others, his act is not at all called sin, but cleverness, economy and sagacity, though meanwhile the poor must suffer want and even die of hunger. Such arguments are merely the specious and blind utterances of heathen, contrary to Christian love.

19. But we have additional light upon this subject, showing that because of such practices the wrath of God comes upon the unbelieving. In First Corinthians 10, 8 are cited numerous examples of punishment for the sin of fornication. See also Num 25. Again, because of wantonness, covetousness and unchastity, the entire world was destroyed by the flood. This is a severe utterance but true and indubitable. "For because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of

disobedience.” ”Sons of disobedience” – in other words, they who have fallen from the faith. Thus we see that he who does not show his faith by his deeds, is accounted practically an infidel. In fact, he is worse than an infidel; he is an apostate Christian, or an apostate from the faith. Therefore comes the wrath of God upon such, even here on earth. This is why we Germans must suffer so much famine, pestilence, war and bloodshed to come upon us.

20. Among these idle chatterers and misleading teachers the sluggards and drones should beware of being classified, who, with better light than the heathen, know full well that covetousness and unchastity are sin. While they teach nothing to controvert this, they notwithstanding trust for salvation in a faith barren of works, on the ground that works cannot effect salvation. They know full well that a faith barren of works is nothing, is a

false faith; that fruit and good works must follow a genuine faith of necessity. Nevertheless they go on in carnal security, without fear of the wrath and judgment of God, who wants the old Adam to be crucified, and to find good fruit on good trees. It is possible that St. Paul does not refer in this passage to those who, like the heathen, teach and maintain by specious arguments that unchastity is no sin; nevertheless there is reason to apprehend that the reward of the heathen will be meted out to them likewise; for they live like the heathen, being strangers to both chastity and kindness. And our apprehension is so much more justified because they have a better knowledge of the wrong they commit. This is Paul's standpoint when he asks (Rom 2, 3): ”And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practice such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” ”After thy hardness and impenitent heart,” he adds, thou ”treasurest up for thyself wrath.”

”Be not ye therefore partakers with them; for ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord.”

21. Peter similarly counsels (I Pet 4, 3) to let the time past of our lives suffice us to have wrought the will of the gentiles, and no longer be partakers with them, but live the rest of our time to the will of God. While we were gentiles we knew not that all those things were sin, because of the darkness of unbelief, which prevented our knowing God. But now we have become a light in the Lord. That is, we have been so amply enlightened through Christ that we not only know God and what he desires, and understand what sin and wrong are, but we are also able to light others, to teach them

what we know. Paul commends the Philippians for being a light in the world, among an evil and untoward generation. Phil. 2, 15. And, similarly, when we were gentiles we not only were darkened, not only were ignorant and went astray, but we were darkness itself, leading others into the same condition by our words and deeds. We have reason, then, to be thankful unto him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (I Pet 2, 9), and to ”walk as children of light.”

”For the fruit of the light [Spirit] is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”

22. Since Paul is speaking of light, it would have been more to the point had he said ”fruit of the light,” in accordance with the Latin version, than

”fruit of the Spirit,” the Greek rendering. And who knows but it may, in the Greek, have been altered to harmonize with Galatians 5, 22, where

Paul speaks of the "fruit of the Spirit"? It matters little, however; evidently "Spirit" and "light" are synonymous in this place. "Goodness" is the fruit of light, or of the Spirit, as opposed to covetousness. The Christian is to be good; that is, useful, gladly working his neighbor's good. "Righteousness," as fruit of the Spirit among men – for the Spirit also "is righteous before God – is opposed to covetousness. The Christian must not

take another's possessions by force, trickery or fraud, but must give to each his due, his own, even to the heathen authorities. See Rom 13, 1. "Truth" is the fruit of the Spirit as opposed to hypocrisy and lies. A Christian is not only to be truthful in word, but honest in life. He should not bear the name without the works; he cannot be a Christian and yet live a heathenish life, a life of unchastity, covetousness and other vices.



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Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 11:14-23

from Luther's Church Sermons

Source: Martin Luther, "First Sunday in Lent," from John Nicholas Lenker, ed., *Luther's Church Postil - Gospels - Epiphany, Lent and Easter Sermons*. Vol. II. Five Volumes. (Vol. XI of *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*). (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans In All Lands, Co., 1906), pp. 155-165. "Translated now for the first time into English, with introduction, Walch's *Analyses* and Bugenhagen's *Summaries* by Prof. John Nicholas Lenker, D.D."

Christ's Defense Against Those Who Slandered Him

Luke 11:14-28

And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

I. Christ's Defense Against His Blasphemers

1. This is a beautiful Gospel from which we learn many different things, and in which nearly everything is set forth as to what Christ, his kingdom and his Gospel are: what they accomplish and how they fare in the world. In the first place, like all the Gospels this one teaches us faith and love; for it presents Christ to us as a most loving Saviour and Helper in every need and tells us that he who believes this is saved. For we see here that Christ had nothing to do with people who were healthy, but with a poor man who was greatly afflicted with many ills. He was blind, as Matthew says; also dumb and possessed with a demon, as Luke tells us here. Now all mutes are also deaf, so that in the Greek language deaf and dumb are one word. By this act Christ draws us to himself, leads us to look to him for every blessing, and to go to him in every time of need. He does this that we also, according to the nature of love, should do unto others as he does unto us. This is the universal and the most precious doctrine of this Gospel and of all the Gospels throughout the church year. This poor man, however, did not come to Christ without the Word; for those who brought him to Christ must have heard his love preached and were moved thereby to trust in him. We learn therefore that faith comes through the Word; but more of this elsewhere.

2. Secondly, it is here demonstrated how Christ and his Gospel fare in the world, namely, that there are three kinds of hearers. Some marvel at him; these are pious and true Christians, who consider this deed so great that they are amazed at it. Some blaspheme the Gospel; these are the Pharisees and scribes, who were vexed because they could not do the like, and were worried lest the people should hold Christ in higher esteem than themselves. Some tempt him, like Herod desired a sign after his own heart, that they may make sport of it. But he answers both parties; at first, the blasphemers in this Gospel, and later on the tempters, saying that no sign shall be given this wicked generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, of which we read in the verses following. He answers the blasphemers in a friendly way and argues five points with them.

3. In the first place, with honest and reasonable arguments he concludes from two comparisons that one devil cannot cast out another; for if that were so, the devils would be divided among themselves and Satan's kingdom would indeed not stand. For nature teaches that if a kingdom is divided against itself and its citizens drive out each other, it is not necessary to go to war against it, for it will come to ruin soon enough of itself. Likewise a house divided against itself needs no other destruction. Even the heathen author Sallust, teaching only from the light of nature and experience, says: "Great wealth passes away through discord, but through concord small means become large." If now the devils were divided among themselves to such a degree that one should drive out the other, Satan's dominion would be at an end, and we would have rest from his attacks.

4. What then were these blasphemers able to say to such clear arguments? They were put to silence, but their hearts were hardened, so that they did not heed his words. A hardened heart will not be instructed, no matter how plainly and clearly the truth is presented; but the faith of the righteous is strengthened when they see that the ground of their faith is right and good. And for the sake of such we must answer those whose hearts are hardened, and put them to silence. Even though they will not be converted nor keep silence still it serves to reveal their hardened hearts, for the longer they talk the more foolish they become, and they are caught in their folly, and their cause is robbed of the appearance of being right and good, as Solomon also says in Pr 26,5: "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." That is, answer him according to his folly that his folly may be put to shame for the sake of others, that they may not follow him and be deceived, thinking that he is right. Otherwise, where no such condition exists, it is better to keep silent, as Solomon also says in the same chapter, verse 4: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him."

5. Nor could they say here that the devils only pretended to be divided among themselves and to

yield to one another in order to deceive the people, for it is publicly seen how they resist and contend, cry and rave, tear and rage, when they see that Christ means to expel them. It is then clearly seen that they are opposed to Christ and his Spirit, and they are not united with him, to whom they must yield so unwillingly. Therefore it is only a flagrant blasphemous lie, in which they are caught and put to shame, by which they try in venomous hate to give the devil credit for a work of God. From this we learn not to be surprised when our doctrine and life are blasphemed and stubborn hearts will not be convinced nor converted, although they are overwhelmed, as it were, with tangible truth and completely put to silence. It is enough that through our arguments their obstinate folly is revealed, acknowledged and made harmless to pious people, so that the latter may not be misled by its fine pretension. They may then go whither they will, they have condemned themselves as St. Paul says, Tit 3, 11.

6. In the second place, he replies with a public example and a similar work, when he says: "By whom do your sons cast them out?" As if he would say: "Is this not simple idiocy? Just what you praise in your sons, you condemn in me. Because your sons do it, it is of God; but because I do it, it must be of the devil." So it is in this world. What Christ does, is of the devil; if some one else did it, it would be all right. Thus the tyrants and enemies of the Gospel do now, when they condemn in us what they themselves do, confess and teach; but they must proceed thus in order that their judgment may be publicly approved, when they are condemned by all justice. The sons, of whom Christ here says that they drive out devils, were, I think, certain exorcists among the people, for God, from the beginning, had given this people manifold spiritual gifts and he calls them their "sons," as though to say: I am the Son of God and must be called a child of the devil, while those who are your sons, begotten by you, do the same things and are not to be considered children of the devil.

7. "Therefore shall they be your judges," that is, I appeal to them. They will be forced to decide that you wrongfully blaspheme me, and thus condemn

yourselves. For if one devil does not drive out another then some other power must do it that is neither satanic nor human, but divine. Hence the words: "But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." This finger of God is called in Mt 12,28 the Holy Ghost, for the words read thus: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons," etc. In short, Christ means to say: If the kingdom of God is to come unto you, the devil must be driven out, for his kingdom is against God's kingdom, as you yourselves must confess. But demon is not driven out by demon, much less by men or the power of men, but alone by the Spirit and power of God.

8. From this follows that where the finger of God does not cast out the devil, there the devil's kingdom still exists; where Satan's kingdom still exists, there the kingdom of God cannot be. The unavoidable conclusion then is that, as long as the Holy Spirit does not enter our hearts, we are not only incapable of any good, but are of necessity in the kingdom of Satan. And if we are in his kingdom, then we can do nothing but that which pleases him, else it could not be called his kingdom. As St. Paul says to Timothy: "The people are taken captive in the snares of the devil unto his will" 2 Tim 2, 26. How could Satan suffer one of his people to take a notion to do something against, and not for, his kingdom? Oh, it is a striking, terrible and powerful statement that Christ here admits such a dominion, which we cannot escape except by the power of God; and that the kingdom of God cannot come to us until that kingdom is driven out by divine, heavenly power.

9. This truth is proved in the case of this poor man, who was bodily possessed of the devil. Tell me, what could he and all mankind do to free him from the devil? Without a doubt, nothing. He had to do and suffer just as his master the devil willed, until Christ came, with the power of God. Now then, if he could not free himself from the devil as to his body, how could he, by his own power, deliver his soul from Satan's spiritual dominion? Especially is this the case since the soul, because possessed of sin, is the cause of all bodily possession as a punishment, and sins are more

difficult to remove than the punishment of them, and the soul is always more firmly possessed than the body. This is proved by the fact that the devil permits the body to have its natural powers and functions; but he robs the soul of reason, judgment, sense, understanding, and all its powers, as you readily see in the case of this possessed man.

10. He answers them in the third place, by a comparison taken from life, namely that of a strong man overcome by one stronger, and robbed of all his armor and goods etc. By this he testifies also that no one but God can overcome the devil, so that again no man can boast of being able of himself to drive out either sin or the devil. Notice how he pictures the devil! He calls him a mighty giant who guards his court and home, that is, the devil not only possesses the world as his own domain, but he has garrisoned and fortified it, so that no one can take it from him. He rules it also with undisputed sway, so that it does whatever he commands. Just as little as a house or court may withstand or contend against the tyrant who is its master, can man's free will and natural powers oppose sin and Satan, that is, not at all; but they are subject to them. And as that house must be conquered by a stronger man and thus wrested from the tyrant, so must man also be ransomed through Christ and wrested from Satan. We see again, therefore, that our works and righteousness contribute absolutely nothing toward our salvation; it is effected alone by the grace of God.

11. He answers them fourthly, with pointed proverbs and teachings, as: "He that is not with me is against me," and, "He that gathereth not with me, scattereth." "The devil is not with me for I drive him out, hence he must of necessity be against me." But this saying does not apply to the devil alone, but also to the blasphemers whom he here convicts and condemns, as being against him since they are not for him. "To be with Christ" is to have the same mind and purpose as Christ, that is, to believe in Christ that his works save us and not our own, for this is what Christ holds and teaches. But "to gather with Christ" is to do good out of love to him, and to become rich in good works. He that does not believe is, by his own

free will, not with Christ but against him, because he depends upon his own works. Therefore, he that does not love, does not gather with Christ, but by fruitless works becomes only more sinful and drifts farther and farther from the faith.

12. In the fifth place, he answers with a threat, namely, that the last state always is worse than the first. Therefore we should take heed that we not only refrain from blaspheming the Gospel and Christ, who does such great things for us and drives the devil out of us; but with zeal and fear hold fast to them, in order that we may not become possessed of seven worse devils whereas one possessed us before. For thus it was with the Jews, who had never been so wicked as while the Gospel was being preached to them. So also under the papacy, we have become seven times, (that is, many times) worse heathen under the name of Christ than we ever had been before; as St. Peter says: "The last state is become worse with them than the first." 2 Pet 2,20. And if we neglect the great light which we now have, it will come to pass in our case also, that we shall become worse than we were before, for the devil does not slumber. This should be sufficient warning.

13. Finally, when the woman cries out to Christ and praises him, saying, "Blessed is the mother that bore such a son," etc., he opposes her carnal worship and takes occasion to teach all of us the substance of this Gospel, namely, that we should not go gaping after the works or merits of the saints but rather see to it that we hear and keep the Word of God. For it does not concern or profit us in the least to know how holy and honorable the mother of this child might be, nor how noble this Son of hers may be; but rather what this Son has done for us, namely that, by grace, without any merit or worthiness on our part, he has redeemed us from the devil. This fact is proclaimed to us through the Word of God, and this we are to hear and hold in firm faith; then shall we too be blessed like this mother and her child. Although such a Word and work will be blasphemed, we should suffer it and give an answer with meekness, as St. Peter teaches, for the improvement of others.

II. The Allegorical Or Spiritual Meaning Of This Gospel

14. This dumb, deaf, blind, and demon-possessed man represents all the children of Adam, who through the flesh are possessed of Satan in original sin, so that they must be his slaves and do according to his will. Hence they are also blind, that is, they do not see God. They are deaf, for they do not hear God's Word, and are not obedient or submissive to it. They are also dumb, for they do not give him one word of thanks or praise, nor do they preach and proclaim Christ and the grace of God. But they are all too talkative about the teachings of the devil and the opinions of men. In these things they see only too well and are wiser than the children of light in their undertakings, opinions, and desires. In these things they hear with both ears and readily adopt the suggestions of flesh and blood. So then, whatever we do, in word and deed, as to both body and soul, is of the devil, whether it be externally good or bad, and must be redeemed through the work of God. We are in his kingdom and therefore we acknowledge him, see, hear, and follow him and praise and proclaim his name. All this takes place through the Spirit of God in his Word, which casts out the devil and his kingdom.

15. The Jews called the chief of the devils Beelzebub. The Hebrew word "sebut" means a fly; "baal" or "beel," a man or ruler, as a householder. When the two words form a combination, they mean an arch-fly or chief-fly, or, in plain German "Fliegenkoenig oder grosse Hummel," that is, king-fly or the great-drone. They gave Satan this contemptuous epithet as though they were entirely free from him, secure against him, and lords over him. That is the way all conceited, corrupt hypocrites do; they imagine they are so pure and holy, that the devil is a helpless, feeble fly compared with them, and that they do not need the grace of Christ nor the Word of God. Still they think he is strong enough for others, yet, that whatever godfearing people teach and do must be the devil's own work, and they consider it such a trifling thing as though it were a

dead fly. The devil can well endure such contempt, for by it he is placed above the true God in their hearts.

16. The tyrant in the court or palace is the devil, as I said before. He is in peace, however, as long as God's Word and finger do not oppose him, and just like this deaf mute, his people do whatever he wishes, for they know no better. His weapons and armor are the carnal conceit, doctrines and traditions of men, by which he terrifies the conscience and protects himself.

17. But when the stronger man, the Gospel, comes, peace flees, and he rages like a madman, for he resents being condemned, unmasked, punished, and publicly branded. Then he gathers up his armor, the powerful, wise, rich and holy people, and sets them all to attacking God's Word, as we see in the persecution of the teachers of the Gospel. Such rage and persecution signify that the devil retires very unwillingly and raves in his whole body; for as he acts in the body and its members when he must depart, so he also behaves in the whole world, resisting with all his power when he is to give place to the Gospel; but it is all in vain, he must be expelled.

18. For a Stronger One, that is, Christ, comes and overpowers him and takes away his whole armor, that is, he converts some of those same persecutors, and to that extent makes him weaker, and his own kingdom stronger. He divides the spoils too, that is, those he converts he uses for various offices, graces, and works in Christendom, of which Paul writes in Rom 12,6. He is also in the court yard or ante-room of the palace, for the devil's kingdom consists in outward appearances and pretenses of wisdom, holiness, and strength; but when it is captured by the Gospel it is found to consist of pure folly, sin and weakness.

19. The text continues, "When the unclean spirit has gone out, he wanders through dry places, seeking rest," etc. This means as much as the saying, "The devil never takes a vacation" and "The devil never sleeps," for he is seeking how he may devour man. "Dry places" are not the hearts of the ungodly, for in such he rests and dwells like a mighty tyrant, as the Gospel here says; but there are dry and waste places here and there in the country where no people live, as forests and wildernesses. To these he flees in wicked rage because he is driven out. You will remember that the devil found Christ in the wilderness. Now, in Judea, there is not much water, hence we read that it contains many and wastes. In other countries, however, as in our own, which are well watered, the devils stay in rivers and lakes, and there they sometimes drown those who bathe or sail upon them. Furthermore, at some places there are water spirits, who entice the children from the shores into the water and drown them. These are all devils.

20. That he comes again and finds the house swept and garnished (Matthew adds "empty") signifies that the man is sanctified and adorned with beautiful spiritual gifts, and that the evil spirit clearly sees that he can do nothing there with his familiar tricks, for he is too well known.

Thus when the worship of idols was driven from the heathen, he never attacked the world with that device again. But what did he do then? He tried something else, went out, took with him seven spirits, more evil than himself, and entered in with them and dwelt there, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. So he has dealt with us. When Christ had become known in the world and the devil's former kingdom with its idol worship had been destroyed, he adopted another plan and attacked us with heresy and introduced and established the papacy, in which Christ was entirely forgotten, and men became worse heathen under the name of Christ than before he was preached, as we can see now with our own eyes. Such also was the lot of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Greeks under the Turks. And so all will fare, who at first hear the Word of God and afterwards become secure and weary of it. St. Matthew says, in Mt 12, 14, that Satan finds the house empty. And in Mt 13, 25, he sowed tares among the wheat, by night, while men slept. Therefore it is necessary for us to watch as the apostles always admonish us, especially St. Peter in 1 Pet 5, 3: "Brethren, be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"; for wherever he overthrows faith, he easily restores again all former vices.



Sermon for the Third Sunday In Lent

Oculi

Luke 11:14-28

from Luther's *House Sermons*

Source: Martin Luther, "Oculi," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*. Volume 1. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 371-388. Translated by Rev. E. Schmid, A.M. Professor in Capital University.

Luke 11, 14-28. And He was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast but devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked. But He said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.

Again we have presented for our consideration a Gospel which treats of the casting out of a devil. The same motive which led to the selection of the Gospel for last Sunday, is apparent in selecting

that for to-day; namely, to exhort people in this, season of Lent to cast out the devil through sorrow, penitence and confession of sins, so that thus an amendment of life may be wrought. But it

matters not whether we read this Gospel today or to-morrow, in summer or during Lent; it will ever be exceedingly valuable, because it exhibits to us a deed of our Lord and Savior, which not only occurred at that time, but the effects of which shall continue to the end of the world, as long as His kingdom is on earth. A similar deed was presented to our notice by the Gospel of last Sunday. To-day we are also told what people thought of it, and this affords us an occasion to learn a very important lesson. First, however, we will dwell upon the deed itself.

We are to learn from this report of the casting out of a devil the most consoling truth that Christ is the Lord over the devil and his realm; and, further, that this work, then begun in the body, did not terminate, but still continues in the Church of Christ, and will continue until the judgment day. For the accomplishment of this work Christ has instituted the necessary means; namely, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Word and Absolution, also other offices pertaining to the ministry, whereby the devil is to be cast out from the people, so that they may become free from his thralldom and that his kingdom may be destroyed. For it is plainly written in this respect: *Verbum meum non redibit vacuum*—My Word shall not return void. As the rain which falls upon dry land produces vegetation and blossoms, thus does the Word of God, most assuredly, produce fruit in some hearts. The Holy Spirit is connected with the Word to illumine, incite and purify the hearts, that they may be set free from the tyranny and oppression of the devil.

This transaction is not visible to the outward eyes, as it was when Christ cast out the devil; it may be entirely imperceptible to the world, which is indeed not worthy to see the least spark of divine light and power, and which is blind, reviles, abuses and defames that which is good, as it did even here in the presence of Christ. We, however, who have and believe the Word, ought to perceive and know this truth which is so full of comfort, that God has ordained among us the means whereby we can and must continually cast out devils.

Every little child born into the world belongs to the kingdom of the devil, where he is lord and exercises his authority on account of sin. Therefore we must bring the little ones to holy Baptism, according to Christ's command, that they may be regenerated into the kingdom of God, as the Lord Himself says, John 3.; then will the devil be cast out and leave them. When the child is baptized into the death of Christ, God bestows upon it His mercy. Thus, also, when a poor distressed conscience, which the devil has caught in his meshes unawares, comes to me for consolation and instruction, I and all Christians have the authority, by Christ's command, to console and cheer the sorrowing brother, by assuring him of the mercy of God through the death of Christ. Then the devil must withdraw; not, indeed, because I a poor miserable sinner have ordered him to do so, but on account of the word of absolution, which Christ has given us upon earth. Again, when our conscience is terrified and timid, so that doubts arise whether God will be merciful and forgive us our sins, we have the Lord's Supper, which Christ Himself instituted as a consolation most sure; because if we partake of His body and blood, we can have no longer any ground to doubt that He gave His body into death for our sins and that His blood was shed for their remission. Where there is such faith and assurance the devil must clear the field; his occupation there is gone.

Thus must the Church of Christ continually engage in the work of expelling the devil. Her warfare with the wicked old serpent, who shows his fangs with a bitter determination to establish his dominion, is a perpetual one. Of these deeds Christ speaks when He says, John 14: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

The reason of this is that the Christian Church extends her offices much farther than Christ did. He labored within the narrow limits of a portion of Judea, and converted but few, since He preached only a little over three years. The Church, however, under the guidance and

protection of her Head and Master, Jesus Christ, who sitteth at the right hand of God, continually pursues the work of evangelizing the world. She preaches the Gospel, administers the sacraments, rebukes the devil unceasingly on account of his wickedness, and casts him out in various places, even from her own domain; for we are not yet entirely rid of him, and must be very vigilant against his wily movements.

Such treatment chagrins the devil very much. And as we cast him out by preaching and the holy sacraments, if he does not succeed in regaining his position he excites persecutions to drive us from the field. Thus it has ever been, and ever will be until the end of time. Christ Himself experienced this; He could not endure the devil, and drove him out wherever He was asked to do so. Hence the devil had a terrible grudge against Jesus, and by means of the Jews nailed Him on the cross and drove Him out of the world. But the devil was routed after all.

Christ did not only cast the devil out of this poor man in our Gospel, but, as we read in the first epistle of St. John, chap. 3: "He came to destroy the works of the devil," that is, to take away from Satan the power over those who believe in Christ. They, however, who do not accept Jesus, remain under the dominion of the devil, and must finally perish as did the Jews; there is no escape from this fate. The faithful, on the other hand, shall be secure; yea they cast the devil out through the Word, and will on the day of judgment sit with Christ as judges over the devil and all the wicked.

...

We have sufficient reason, then, heartily to thank God for such abundant grace, and should not complain if now and then the devil annoys us. He is very much out of sorts that we poor sinners should have the ability, by means of the Word, to compel him to move his quarters; for he is a very proud and self-important spirit. He proposes therefore to take full vengeance upon us, and besets us with persecutions and afflictions. These we should endure patiently, since we know that we can not only cast him out, but that we shall also be his judges to condemn him for ever into the abyss of hell.

From such deeds we should learn to esteem highly the Word of God and the holy Sacraments, and not speak of them so disrespectfully as the philosophers commonly do. If we judge the sacraments merely by our sight, it is true, we can see in them only external signs. Thus the Word is also an external thing, which we hear with our ears and read in the Scriptures; and the Christians are bodily, visible men, but on that account they are not to be despised. If a Christian uses the Word according to the command of Christ, he has the power to drive the devil before him on every occasion.

The humble appearance of the Word and Sacraments ought not to offend us, but should be for us a source of thanksgiving to God for His merciful condescension in giving us by such humble means the greatest of divine blessings. We men are in the conflict with Satan weak as a straw, so that, if he could bring all his power to bear upon us, we would surely have to perish. But what does God do in our behalf? He lights up this wavering little straw by means of His Word, the fire divine, and prepares such a bright light and lustre in the world that the devil is confounded and affrighted; he is compelled to leave his hiding-places and to remove his habitation. Hence the apostle Paul calls the Gospel a divine power, through which men are saved; a power of God which rescues from sin and death, giving in return justification and life, bringing us from hell into heaven, from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God.

We Christians should be well acquainted with this fact and praise God for it; we should esteem His Word and Sacraments as our highest treasure and blessing. The unbelievers however are not worthy to perceive such glorious majesty and power of the Word of God, as it is well said; *Tollatur impius, ne videat gloriam Dei*, "The wicked man must be removed that he cannot see the glory of God;" or as Isaiah says concerning the Jews: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." We have indeed great reason to thank God for the knowledge and experience of the glory and majesty of His Word, and should heartily rejoice and be comforted that we poor beggars and sinners have such a power at our command, before which the devil cannot stand.

Thus the work of casting out the devil still continues among the Christians; the deaf hear and the dumb begin to speak, though not in an external manner. For surely, it is a mightier work to drive the devil from the heart than merely to expel him from the body. The heart of man is his strongest fortress. Christ however drives him also out of the body, that we may realize His power, seeing it with our eyes, and that we might firmly believe that He will also, by the Word and Absolution, by Baptism and the Lord's Supper, though they be humble means, drive out the devil effectually from the heart, no matter how well he may have fortified himself there.

Such gracious gifts God has bestowed upon us. We ought to use them earnestly and well, with gratitude and assurance, against the devil, that we may drive him from his stronghold in the hearts of men. He may persecute us as to the body on this account, but that matters not; when the day of judgment comes he will be expelled from his power forever. This is the first lesson of the text, for which, rejoicing in the comfort, we ought to be duly thankful to God.

The Gospel continues to relate what that saintly virgin, the world, thought of this deed of Christ. There were three kinds of spectators there. The first class, consisting of the common people, was the most devout. They are astonished at this deed

of Christ, and, undoubtedly, praised God for what they saw. But the number of those whose eyes are opened, who perceive the glory and might of the Word, is very small; they regard its effect as wonderful, and do not cease to praise the Word of God, which converts the people and deprives the devil of his power. They, therefore, never weary of hearing the Word preached to them.

The other two classes of beholders have their hearts hardened. With open eyes they do not perceive that it must be a divine power which quickly healed the man who had been deaf and dumb, so that he could hear and speak like other men, yea, a power which made the man who had been raving and mad, peaceable and quiet. These people are so blind, foolish and wicked that they ascribe this merciful deed of Christ, which they had witnessed, to the devil.

They might have been amazed and could have said: He casteth out the devils, therefore it may be that He possesses some especial influence, or a peculiar gift of God. This, however, they do not say, but with effrontery assert that God could have nothing to do with this deed, that the devil must be in Christ, and that the whole occurrence was only trickery and deception. They denied that it was a miracle of God; if it was one at all, they think, the devil must have wrought it. So blind and covered were there eyes, so hardened were their hearts, that they do not see the finger of God in this deed, and even venture to say that it is the work of the devil, such as conjurers may perform.

In this their wicked assertion and horrible blasphemy, they are so bold that they call the devil by a very disreputable name, Beelzebub, which means a bumblebee or a fly. They speak scornfully of the devil, as if they were great saints, full of the Holy Ghost, and the devil, compared with them, were like a bumblebee. Paul, the mighty apostle, does not thus disdainfully speak of him, but calls him a prince, the god of this world. But these big saints imagine that if they speak contemptuously of the devil they represent his casting out by Christ as an insignificant performance. They mean to say: This

deed is not worthy of astonishment, for the devil can easily cast out another devil.

They cannot deny the deed itself, so they intentionally disparage it, and forget that they themselves are possessed of a thousand devils, since they are blasphemers, murderers, liars, seducers and in every way the most pliant tools of the devil, and all this because they act as though they had nothing to fear of him.

It is not otherwise in our day. The blessed Gospel, God be praised, is again preached, pure and true, in all decency and order. We rejoice that some pious souls receive this Gospel with alacrity and gladness, and are amazed at the mercy and compassion of God, giving thanks unto Him with all their hearts. Again, there are many who exert themselves to the utmost to persecute and overthrow it. ... We learn from experience that the devil may lead even the just into sin, and retard the work of God. Hence the Christians do not call him Beelzebub, a bumblebee, but, with St. Paul, a prince and god of this world.

We know well enough how strong he is, and how he holds with a tenacious grasp a person once given to error and heresy, so that it requires repeated instruction and exhortation to rescue such an one from the captivity of the devil. Thus also when he has allured a person into fornication or adultery, into avarice, wrath, hatred, envy and other crimes, I am sure he holds his victims as in a vice. If one cord or chain does not suffice he takes a hundred more, so that there is no possibility of escape by one's own strength.

Hence the Christians will never despise the devil, as the self-righteous saints do who call him a bumblebee, but they know him as "a mighty lord and prince and god of this world," who can lead people into sin and shame, into despair and anguish, into sorrow and every kind of distress, yea, who would slay us if God permitted it. The pope and his crowd neither understand nor believe this, although they see and experience it repeatedly.

The Pharisees, who blaspheme Christ and His deed so vilely, are seven times more violently and dangerously possessed of the devil than this poor man, since they ... not only misapprehend the Word, but also defame and persecute it in the most devilish manner. And yet they are as unconcerned as if their actions were all well and good.

It must so happen, if the devil is to be cast out from among us, and the Gospel is to be preached, that some will "wonder," while others will regard our doctrine as false and dangerous, and therefore abuse it as a heresy and doctrine of the devil. But this shall not offend us nor stay our work. We will not deny that it is painful when ... [Christ's opponents] slander and blaspheme, as if the devil were to be feared no more than a bumblebee. The Lord Himself met with the same reproach when He performed this great miracle and cast out the devil "with the finger of God;" they talked as though it were as easy to cast out devils as it is to drive off a bumblebee which flies about our head; and asserted that Satan himself assisted in the work. This is one class of the unbelieving witnesses of the work of God, who, instead of praising, blaspheme Him.

The third kind of spectators consists of those who make it a condition of their faith to see a sign from heaven. They are not far removed from the others in their wickedness, only they are not so bold in their assertions. They seek a sign while they have one already; they see it too, but they do not regard it as a true heavenly sign, and would have the Lord to show them one in the heavens; perhaps, that He should make for them a new moon, new stars and the like.

Sapient fellows indeed, who desire to instruct the Lord our God as to the signs which He should show! It would tickle them amazingly if the Lord would assume the character of a juggler, and would exhibit to them some extraordinary feats of magic, as if the Lord our God had nothing else to do but to satisfy their curiosity.

Such men are plenty in our day, especially among the great and honored ones of this world. ...

These men would also prescribe to God the routine of His duties, how His affairs might be managed much more prudently than they now are, and how He ought to send them such preachers as they would like to have. Lay your plans, noble lords—and God will do as He pleases.

Nor is it much better among us, who claim to be adherents of the Gospel, evangelical Christians. In cities and in the country people undertake to dictate to their preachers what they should preach and what would be acceptable to the hearers. And when a preacher, true to his office, rebukes the prevailing vices, plainly and fearlessly, so that every one can understand what and whom he means, though no names are mentioned, they scream with all their might that such preaching is improper and seditious, and ought to be suppressed by the government; that the Gospel ought to be preached without rebuking and publicly disgracing people. As if it were a defamation or abuse of those in authority when they are told the truth! What think you of such pious souls? Do you not think that they belong to the same family with those who in our Gospel witness the glorious miracle, but do not regard it as such, and ask for another sign which would please their fancy? Such people wish to rule in the land and community where they are, but also in the Church and over the Word of God. Such children will be pleasing to God—very!

But it is nowhere said that, because we should honor the authorities of the State, and raise no injurious reports concerning them, we ought to place such human authority above God and His Word. No, our rulers are also subject to this Word and to God, just as we are, and Him they must obey. If they act otherwise, we are in duty bound to reprove them without reserve, and to tell them what they do not like to hear, without considering whether they will frown at us or whether they will smile. The Gospel spares no one, be he of high or low estate; it rebukes what is wrong in every one.

To do this, God gave pastors and preachers; their duties are grave, and they must fulfill their office, so that they can give an account thereof on the day of judgment. If they do not rebuke you when

you ought to be rebuked, God will demand your blood at their hands. Why then should we preachers put a still heavier load upon ourselves on your account, by preaching whatever pleases you? Remember that the Word is not our own, and that we are not here at your bidding to preach and to do according to your prescription. Faithful preachers dare not and will not shape their preaching to suit the notions of men. The church-doors are open; let him therefore who will not hear the truth go out, for it is not his business to regulate the office of the ministry.

These are the three kinds of persons present at the wonderful deed of Christ. The first are astonished and pleased, and praise it very much; the others are hostile to the Lord and abuse Him; the third, finally, desire Him to carry out their own whims. The Gospel will always have such different hearers.

The ministers of the Gospel will ever have to contend with such people; they must defend the honor of their Lord by preaching His Word fearlessly; nor will they be prompted either by the favor or by the ill-will of the hearers. If people do not wish to be converted it is not our fault; we have done our duty in presenting to them the truth and in rebuking them for their abuse of the Gospel. If they persist in not accepting our preaching, well and good; let them go to that place where they will comprehend the folly of their ways, and where they will see whom they have despised, abused and blasphemed.

The Lord answers those first, who had accused Him of casting out the devil through Beelzebub, and gives them a simple and easy reply: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub." This is a comparison which our understanding can easily comprehend. Where man and wife quarrel in their home, when he smashes the pots and the kettles, their house-keeping must come to a speedy end. Our experience teaches us that variance and contention lay waste entire countries, and break

up whole families. What the Pharisees and Scribes said is therefore against all common sense, and they talk like fools and madmen. ...

We should not forget, in this connection, that Christ says that the devil has a kingdom, one that is well united and compact. If we offend one devil we offend the whole batch of them; if we attack one we attack all. If these devils did not work together in such close harmony, we would have gained more of the pope's followers. But since the realm of the devil is strong and united, it comes to pass that many people will not accept or believe the truth.

If we hear the Word, or are baptized, or receive the Sacrament of the Altar, we make an inroad upon the domain of Satan, and the reason that the devil with all his assistants does not prevail against us, is that the kingdom of Christ is also strong and united. As soon as the devil pounces upon you he attacks also Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, as He says to Paul: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This is our consolation; but at the same time we should realize the fact that to be a Christian means more than child's play, since a mighty power is opposed to us, so that we would be in constant danger if God did not cover us with His grace.

Perhaps you will ask here: How does it happen that the conjurers, who are openly vicious and wicked men, can cast out devils? Remember this, that God does not work through them, but the devil himself. I myself saw a man full of devils, yet the priest who exorcised him was so certain in his work that he placed his hand in the mad man's mouth. Do we not see then that one devil casteth out another? I answer: St. Paul says that in the last times the devil will also perform signs, but they will be "lying wonders." He does not do them to promote the cause of the Gospel, but to lead people away from the faith into idolatry. I know that St. Cyriax, St. Anstet and other saints cast out devils, and that many thus possessed were brought to them, but the whole performance was the devil's own work; he left the sick, not

because he was compelled, but of his own accord, that he might thus strengthen the superstition of the people. Likewise he often pretended that he was afraid of a consecrated candle, of a little salt, of holy water and the like. He did this for the sole purpose of strengthening people in their superstition, so that they might not come to the true faith, nor have confidence in God and His Word. These signs were therefore *mendacia signa*, false and "lying wonders," as St. Paul calls them; they were mere pretenses.

Let us look to the real and true signs; let us see how Christ and His apostles cast out the devil through the Word, so that he had to leave, whether he chose to do so or not. We will then discover how different the circumstances were. Here the devil had to come out, to testify thereby to the strength and glory of the Word of God and of the Christian faith. He does not do this voluntarily; hence neither the cross, nor holy water, nor other tricks will be of any avail.

Where it is to the advantage of the devil, for the purpose of spreading his lies and estranging an ungrateful world from Christ, by plunging them deeper and deeper into superstition, so that they will call upon the devil rather than upon Christ, he may indeed suffer himself to be cast out by some wicked conjurers. The whole transaction takes place to oppose the Gospel, to spread error and falsehood, ... Where this can be gained the devil is very ready to be cast out. But where the finger of God is to be made manifest, and Christ's kingdom to be established, the devil is very tenacious, and refuses to be cast out as long as he possibly can; as Jesus shows us in the parable of the strong man armed, who keepeth his palace.

Let us then thank God for the mercy shown unto us in sending His Son as a Savior from the power of Satan, and also for the Word which He has left us, whereby the devil is to be cast out continually, to the establishment and extension of the kingdom of God. May God continue unto us such mercy, through His Son and the Holy Ghost! Amen.

