

Oculi - Third Sunday in Lent

Hymns: 262, 261, 370, 428

(omit Gloria, responses before & after the Gospel reading, and other ascriptions of praise during Lent.)

The INTROIT

(Ps. 25:15,16,1,2)

P: Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord;

C: for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.

P: Turn Thee unto me and have mercy upon me;

C: for I am desolate and afflicted.

P: Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul;

C: O my God, I trust in Thee; let me not be ashamed.

(The "Gloria in Excelsis" is omitted during the Penitential Season of Lent)

The COLLECT

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of Thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

2 Samuel 22:1-7 (NKJV)

Then David spoke to the LORD the words of this song, on the day when the LORD had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. And he said: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. When the waves of death surrounded me, The floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry entered His ears."

THE GRADUAL

(Ps. 91:1-2,4,11-12)

P: Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail; let the heathen be judged in Thy sight.

C: When mine enemies are turned back; they shall fall and perish at Thy presence.

P: Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens.

C: Have mercy upon us, O Lord have mercy upon us.

The EPISTLE

Ephesians 5:1-9 (NKJV)

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you

with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth).

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Philippians 2:8)

P: Christ has humbled himself, and become obedient unto death:

C: even the death of the cross.

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 11:14-28 (NKJV)

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Luke 11:14-28 — "And the Multitudes Marveled"

INTRODUCTION

I. AND THE MULTITUDES MARVELED

II. BUT SOME OF THEM SAID

III. IN THE FINGER OF GOD

CONCLUSION

(Matthew 23:4) For^{G1063} they bind^{G1195} heavy^{G926} burdens^{G5413} and^{G2532} grievous to be borne,^{G1419} and^{G2532} lay^{G2007} them on^{G1909} men's^{G444} shoulders,^{G5606} but^{G1161} they themselves will^{G2309} not^{G3756} move^{G2795} them^{G846} with one of their^{G848} fingers.^{G1147}

(Mark 7:33) And^{G2532} he took^{G618} him^{G846} aside^{G2596} from^{G575} the^{G3588} multitude,^{G3793} and put^{G906} his^{G848} fingers^{G1147} into^{G1519} his^{G846} ears,^{G3775} and^{G2532} he spit,^{G4429} and touched^{G680} his^{G846} tongue,^{G1100}

(Luke 11:20) But^{G1161} if^{G1487} I with^{G1722} the finger^{G1147} of God^{G2316} cast out^{G1544} devils,^{G1140} no doubt^{G686} the^{G3588} kingdom^{G932} of God^{G2316} is come^{G5348} upon^{G1909} you.^{G5209}

(Luke 11:46) And^{G1161} he^{G3588} said,^{G2036} Woe^{G3759} unto you^{G5213} also,^{G2532} ye lawyers!^{G3544} for^{G3754} ye lade^{G5412} men^{G444} with burdens^{G5413} grievous to be borne,^{G1419} and^{G2532} ye yourselves^{G846} touch^{G4379} not^{G3756} the^{G3588} burdens^{G5413} with one^{G1520} of your^{G5216} fingers.^{G1147}

(Luke 16:24) And^{G2532} he^{G846} cried^{G5455} and said,^{G2036} Father^{G3962} Abraham,^{G11} have mercy^{G1653} on me,^{G3165} and^{G2532} send^{G3992} Lazarus,^{G2976} that^{G2443} he may dip^{G911} the^{G3588} tip^{G206} of his^{G848} finger^{G1147} in water,^{G5204} and^{G2532} cool^{G2711} my^{G3450} tongue;^{G1100} for^{G3754} I am tormented^{G3600} in^{G1722} this^{G5026} flame.^{G5395}

(John 8:6) (G1161) This^{G5124} they said,^{G3004} tempting^{G3985} him,^{G846} that^{G2443} they might have^{G2192} to accuse^{G2723} him.^{G846} But^{G1161} Jesus^{G2424} stooped^{G2955} down,^{G2736} and with his^{G846} finger^{G1147} wrote^{G1125} on^{G1519} the^{G3588} ground,^{G1093} as though he heard^{G4364} them not.^{G3361}

(John 20:25) The^{G3588} other^{G243} disciples^{G3101} therefore^{G3767} said^{G3004} unto him,^{G846} We have seen^{G3708} the^{G3588} Lord.^{G2962} But^{G1161} he^{G3588} said^{G2036} unto them,^{G846} Except^{G3362} I shall see^{G1492} in^{G1722} his^{G846} hands^{G5495} the^{G3588} print^{G5179} of the^{G3588} nails,^{G2247} and^{G2532} put^{G906} my^{G3450} finger^{G1147} into^{G1519} the^{G3588} print^{G5179} of the^{G3588} nails,^{G2247} and^{G2532} thrust^{G906} my^{G3450} hand^{G5495} into^{G1519} his^{G846} side,^{G4125} I will not^{G3364} believe.^{G4100}

(John 20:27) Then^{G1534} saith^{G3004} he to Thomas,^{G2381} Reach^{G5342} hither^{G5602} thy^{G4675} finger,^{G1147} and^{G2532} behold^{G1492} my^{G3450} hands;^{G5495} and^{G2532} reach^{G5342} hither thy^{G4675} hand,^{G5495} and^{G2532} thrust^{G906} it into^{G1519} my^{G3450} side:^{G4125} and^{G2532} be^{G1096} not^{G3361} faithless,^{G571} but^{G235} believing.^{G4103}

(Matthew 23:4) δεσμευουσιν^{G1195 V-PAI-3P} γαρ^{G1063 CONJ} φορτια^{G5413 N-APN} βαρεα^{G926 A-APN} και^{G2532 CONJ} δυσβαστακτα^{G1419 A-APN} και^{G2532 CONJ} επιτιθεασιν^{G2007 V-PAI-3P-ATT} επι^{G1909 PREP} τους^{G3588 T-APM} ωμους^{G5606 N-APM} των^{G3588 T-GPM} ανθρωπων^{G444 N-GPM} τω^{G3588 T-DSM} δε^{G1161 CONJ} δακτυλω^{G1147 N-DSM} αυτων^{G846 P-GPM} ου^{G3756 PRT-N} θελουσιν^{G2309 V-PAI-3P} κινησαι^{G2795 V-AAN} αυτα^{G846 P-APN}

(Mark 7:33) και^{G2532 CONJ} απολαβομενος^{G618 V-2AMP-NSM} αυτον^{G846 P-ASM} απο^{G575 PREP} του^{G3588 T-GSM} οχλου^{G3793 N-GSM} κατ^{G2596 PREP} ιδιαν^{G2398 A-ASF} εβαλεν^{G906 V-2AAI-3S} τους^{G3588 T-APM} δακτυλους^{G1147 N-APM} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} εις^{G1519 PREP} τα^{G3588 T-APN} ωτα^{G3775 N-APN} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} και^{G2532 CONJ} πτυσας^{G4429 V-AAP-NSM} ηψατο^{G680 V-ADI-3S} της^{G3588 T-GSF} γλωσσης^{G1100 N-GSF} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM}

(Luke 11:20) ει^{G1487 COND} δε^{G1161 CONJ} εν^{G1722 PREP} δακτυλω^{G1147 N-DSM} θεου^{G2316 N-GSM}
εκβαλλω^{G1544 V-PAI-1S} τα^{G3588 T-APN} δαιμονια^{G1140 N-APN} αρα^{G686 PRT} εφθασεν^{G5348 V-AAI-3S} εφ^{G1909 PREP}
υμας^{G4771 P-2AP} η^{G3588 T-NSF} βασιλεια^{G932 N-NSF} του^{G3588 T-GSM} θεου^{G2316 N-GSM}

(Luke 11:46) ο^{G3588 T-NSM} δε^{G1161 CONJ} ειπεν^{G3004 V-2AAI-3S} και^{G2532 CONJ} υμιν^{G4771 P-2DP} τοις^{G3588 T-}
DPM νομικοις^{G3544 A-DPM} ουαι^{G3759 INJ} οτι^{G3754 CONJ} φορτιζετε^{G5412 V-PAI-2P} τους^{G3588 T-APM}
ανθρωπους^{G444 N-APM} φορτια^{G5413 N-APN} δυσβαστακτα^{G1419 A-APN} και^{G2532 CONJ} αυτοι^{G846 P-NPM}
ενι^{G1520 A-DSM} των^{G3588 T-GPM} δακτυλων^{G1147 N-GPM} υμων^{G4771 P-2GP} ου^{G3756 PRT-N} προσψαυετε^{G4379 V-}
PAI-2P τοις^{G3588 T-DPN} φορτιοις^{G5413 N-DPN}

(Luke 16:24) και^{G2532 CONJ} αυτος^{G846 P-NSM} φωνησας^{G5455 V-AAP-NSM} ειπεν^{G3004 V-2AAI-3S} πατερ^{G3962}
N-VSM αβρααμ^{G11 N-PRI} ελεησον^{G1653 V-AAM-2S} με^{G1473 P-1AS} και^{G2532 CONJ} πεμψον^{G3992 V-AAM-2S}
λαζαρον^{G2976 N-ASM} ινα^{G2443 CONJ} βαψη^{G911 V-AAS-3S} το^{G3588 T-ASN} ακρον^{G206 N-ASN} του^{G3588 T-GSM}
δακτυλου^{G1147 N-GSM} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} υδατος^{G5204 N-GSN} και^{G2532 CONJ} καταψυξη^{G2711 V-AAS-3S} την^{G3588}
T-ASF γλωσσαν^{G1100 N-ASF} μου^{G1473 P-1GS} οτι^{G3754 CONJ} οδυνωμαι^{G3600 V-PPI-1S} εν^{G1722 PREP} τη^{G3588 T-DSF}
φλογι^{G5395 N-DSF} ταυτη^{G3778 D-DSF}

(John 8:6) τουτο^{G3778 D-ASN} δε^{G1161 CONJ} ελεγον^{G3004 V-IAI-3P} πειραζοντες^{G3985 V-PAP-NPM} αυτον^{G846}
P-ASM ινα^{G2443 CONJ} εχωσιν^{G2192 V-PAS-3P} κατηγορειν^{G2723 V-PAN} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} ο^{G3588 T-NSM} δε^{G1161}
CONJ ιησους^{G2424 N-NSM} κατω^{G2736 ADV} κυψας^{G2955 V-AAP-NSM} τω^{G3588 T-DSM} δακτυλω^{G1147 N-DSM}
εγραφεν^{G1125 V-IAI-3S} εις^{G1519 PREP} την^{G3588 T-ASF} γην^{G1093 N-ASF} | | μη^{G3361 PRT-N} προσποιουμενος^{G4364}
V-PNP-NSM |

(John 20:25) ελεγον^{G3004 V-IAI-3P} ουν^{G3767 CONJ} αυτω^{G846 P-DSM} οι^{G3588 T-NPM} αλλοι^{G243 A-NPM}
μαθηται^{G3101 N-NPM} εωρακαμεν^{G3708 V-RAI-1P-ATT} τον^{G3588 T-ASM} κυριον^{G2962 N-ASM} ο^{G3588 T-NSM} δε^{G1161}
CONJ ειπεν^{G3004 V-2AAI-3S} αυτοις^{G846 P-DPM} εαν^{G1437 COND} μη^{G3361 PRT-N} ιδω^{G3708 V-2AAS-1S} εν^{G1722 PREP}
ταις^{G3588 T-DPF} χειρσιν^{G5495 N-DPF} αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} τον^{G3588 T-ASM} τυπον^{G5179 N-ASM} των^{G3588 T-GPM}
ηλων^{G2247 N-GPM} και^{G2532 CONJ} βαλω^{G906 V-2AAS-1S} τον^{G3588 T-ASM} δακτυλον^{G1147 N-ASM} μου^{G1473 P-1GS}
εις^{G1519 PREP} τον^{G3588 T-ASM} τυπον^{G5179 N-ASM} των^{G3588 T-GPM} ηλων^{G2247 N-GPM} και^{G2532 CONJ} βαλω^{G906 V-}
2AAS-1S την^{G3588 T-ASF} χειρα^{G5495 N-ASF} μου^{G1473 P-1GS} εις^{G1519 PREP} την^{G3588 T-ASF} πλευραν^{G4125 N-ASF}
αυτου^{G846 P-GSM} ου^{G3756 PRT-N} μη^{G3361 PRT-N} πιστευσω^{G4100 V-FAI-1S}

(John 20:27) ειτα^{G1534 ADV} λεγει^{G3004 V-PAI-3S} τω^{G3588 T-DSM} θωμα^{G2381 N-DSM} φερε^{G5342 V-PAM-2S}
τον^{G3588 T-ASM} δακτυλον^{G1147 N-ASM} σου^{G4771 P-2GS} ωδε^{G5602 ADV} και^{G2532 CONJ} ιδε^{G3708 V-AAM-2S} τας^{G3588}
T-APF χειρας^{G5495 N-APF} μου^{G1473 P-1GS} και^{G2532 CONJ} φερε^{G5342 V-PAM-2S} την^{G3588 T-ASF} χειρα^{G5495 N-ASF}
σου^{G4771 P-2GS} και^{G2532 CONJ} βαλε^{G906 V-2AAM-2S} εις^{G1519 PREP} την^{G3588 T-ASF} πλευραν^{G4125 N-ASF} μου^{G1473}
P-1GS και^{G2532 CONJ} μη^{G3361 PRT-N} γινου^{G1096 V-PNM-2S} απιστος^{G571 A-NSM} αλλα^{G235 CONJ} πιστος^{G4103 A-NSM}

Luke 11:14-28 — “And the Multitudes Marveled”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday of Oculi is Luke 11:14-28:

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!” But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Today’s Gospel lesson begins with people marveling at the works of the Lord Jesus and ends with them marveling concerning His words. In between the people refused to believe in Him, even though they marveled at His works and words. What we are taught in this lesson is that faith is not something that we comprehend with the mind. Faith is not made to be ours through human reason. Faith is made to be ours as God touches us with a holy finger to judge the demonic forces as having no place in us so that they leave us to stand in God’s holiness.

I. AND THE MULTITUDES MARVELED

And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled.

This chapter of Luke's account of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus begins with the gift of the prayer that we call the "Lord's Prayer." After teaching this prayer He contrasts the gifts of earthly fathers with our heavenly Father's gift of the Holy Spirit. In the next sentence we hear of Jesus casting out a demon so that the man is set free and enabled to speak, so that the multitudes who saw it marveled.

What this shows us is how far our minds are from the goodness of our heavenly Father. Jesus had just finished speaking to the people about how natural it should be for us to recognize the goodness of our heavenly Father who works good things for us every moment of our lives and also desires to give us His Holy Spirit, and when these same people see God at work to do this for this demon possessed man, they marvel.

Why on earth should any of us ever marvel to behold God's goodness at work among us? The reason that we marvel is on account of our unbelief. Our sin blinds us to God's goodness so that we do not expect to see it. When we do see it, we marvel. We wonder about it. We question whether it is for real. We wonder whether it can be trusted. Then we try to make sense out of it by means of our corrupted human reason. We see it, but we do not believe. Often we even turn aside from what we see God work in our lives, choosing instead to believe that we must accomplish these things by means of our own wisdom and efforts. God works His goodness among us freely, but we turn aside to our own providence. We insist that we must discover our own cures and our own remedies. How often we seek medicine even before we are willing to pray. When we do pray, how often we pray for God to help us to fix things for ourselves by our own methods.

The more that we think, the more that we marvel, the more that we reject the faith that God works in us and turn to our own reason and strength. God gives us medicine from heaven and we doubt the power of God to work through these means. Our doctors give us medicines that fail us and we offer them our treasures. God comes to us with miracles of forgiveness and restoration to life and we stand and think about them. Our politicians tell us how they will help us by taxing us and our doctors tell us how they will help us by means of expensive surgeries and medicines and we praise them for their excellence. God asks nothing of us whatsoever and offers us everlasting life and healing of our souls, our minds, our emotions, and our bodies, and we wonder what this means.

In Matthew's account of the reaction of the multitudes when they saw that Jesus had cast out the demon so that the mute spoke, he says that they marveled and said, **"It was never seen like this in Israel!"**

What? Every year they celebrated the Passover, receiving God's salvation and remembering how God delivered them from Egypt. All the mighty miracles that God performed were observed again in this Sacrament. The crowds often spoke of the miracles that were performed by God through Elijah, too. How could they stand around and marvel and say that such things were never done in Israel?

This is what happens when people imagine that faith is their own work. This is the form that praise takes when praise is our service to God rather than the service that He works for us. This is why the divine liturgy always directs our hearts away from our actions so that we may hear and repeat the glories of God in what He works for us in Christ Jesus. Then, rather than striving to draw near to God we realize that God has come near to us. Then, rather than striving to give glory to God, we receive Him in His glory as He gives Himself to us.

II. BUT SOME OF THEM SAID

But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.” Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven.

What in the hell is wrong with people? This truly is the correct response to such things. Such a response to the works of Jesus could only come from hearts that are bound for hell.

This is terrifying and greatly offensive to hear, for when we realize that the crowds responded with a hellacious response, we also realize that according to our own sinful nature that we also respond as those who are bound for hell. Consider the way that our sinful nature causes us to treat Baptism. God promises that through Baptism that He pours the Holy Spirit out to us and washes us so that our sinful nature is drowned and a new creation rises up to live in His holiness. Yet rather than trusting God’s promise, we insist that we must somehow drive the devil out of our own hearts and strive to be holy by our own efforts. When the preachers of the Gospel condemn our false beliefs, we speak of them as blasphemers and liars. When the preachers of the Gospel tell us to abandon our striving after holiness and to trust that our sanctification is truly God’s work, accomplished for us through Baptism, we scorn this and turn back again to our own striving.

This is exactly what those did who accused Jesus of casting out demons in the name of Beelzebub. Rather than giving God the glory, they turned to their own thoughts, thoughts that insisted that such marvelous things must be a trick of some kind. And so they turned God’s means of grace into mere symbols of what they must do for themselves and called the Word of God, Jesus, a servant of the ruler of demons. The same is true today when what Jesus says is worked through the power of His name, baptizing people into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, is counted as just something to help us to strive to be holy by our own thoughts, words and deeds.

Because God is blasphemed regarding how we are made to be holy and worthy of coming to Him in His kingdom, He is also blasphemed regarding how we continue in His kingdom. Some in the crowds demanded that Jesus produce signs to prove that when He cast out this demon that He did it as God’s servant and not as a servant of the devil. Today people demand that Jesus produce some special sign that in His Holy Communion that what people receive is truly His righteousness. The special sign that is demanded today often is called self-examination. Jesus says that because we are baptized into Him that we should examine ourselves to see that we need to receive Him in the Holy Supper so that we will gladly receive Him in this blessed way that He has commanded. But instead, we turn this examination into an examination of our own works and of our own faith, rather than of the work of faith that He works in us in connection with Baptism. Then we look upon His gracious sacrifice not as a means of grace by which we eat and drink salvation and everlasting life, but as something for which we must be made worthy by our own faith.

III. IN THE FINGER OF GOD

But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

You know, when someone slanders me, my first reaction tends to be one of anger. But our Lord demonstrates that His first thought towards us blasphemous sinners is compassion. Our Lord is continually looking toward us with the desire that we should be brought to repentance so that rather than having to face His anger, we may receive His merciful absolution.

And so our Lord preaches concerning the ludicrousness of imagining that anyone other than God has the power to set a person free from the powers of the evil one. Never, absolutely never, does the devil work against his own kingdom. Absolutely never does the devil let loose of a person over whom he has gained control. Once the devil takes charge of a life, he holds that person in the bonds of sin and binds that person for hell.

No, when a demon is made to leave, this is the finger of God at work.

In this instance our Lord uses a word that has very special meaning attached to it. The word used for God’s almighty power is usually the word for hand. But here the Lord uses the word for finger.

This word is used several times, especially in the New Testament. In Matthew 23:4 Jesus says of the scribes and the Pharisees, **“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”** Luke records the same later in this same chapter of today’s text. Here the finger is a judgment against others, binding people to the burdens of their own works of righteousness. Jesus shows that rather than the finger of the preacher being used to point people to what they should do, the preacher’s finger should be used to point people to the works of God by which they have their burdens all taken away. The preacher’s finger should point to Jesus Christ and Him crucified, who is poured out upon us with the water and fed to us with the bread and the wine.

Luke records in chapter 16 that the rich man cries out from hell begging that Lazarus should be allowed to dip his finger in water to extend a drop of mercy to the rich man in hell.

John records that when Jesus was asked to condemn the adulterous woman, instead, He stooped down and began writing in the ground with His finger.

Again John records that after the resurrection, Thomas demanded to be able to judge for himself the truth of the resurrection with the demand to stick his finger into the wounds of Jesus. Jesus came again to the disciples and fulfilled Thomas’ demand.

And so in our text we read that our Lord speaks of a finger of judgment, and when that finger of judgment works a work of God’s mercy, there remains no question as to who the one is who has done it. And so we learn that even the faith that causes us to trust in God’s works of

mercy, is a miracle of God. For by our own reason and strength we always challenge God and demand proof. For faith is God's work which He gives to us freely. By this faith we draw near to receive our God of grace in His Supper, as Hebrews 10 promises:

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:18-25)

Yes, truly we are baptized into Jesus' name of holiness and called to assemble into the gathering for His Supper of the Holy Communion. Through these blessed means He casts out our demons and blesses us to live in His holiness. When we receive these as His works, we live in the freedom of His grace, mercy, and peace and exhort one another, proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes. Truly this is that to which the finger of God directs us, and that which the finger of God works for us and in us.

CONCLUSION

Today's text begins with God's grace and ends with God's grace. Our text begins by telling us of the Lord Jesus casting out a demon which caused the people to marvel. Our text concludes with a woman marveling and the Lord Jesus casting out her demon by declaring again the means of grace.

And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Yes, like this woman, we are inclined to hear the words of the Gospel and then turn aside to the praise of men and of our works and the things of this world. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel and this woman blessed Mary. We do likewise today. We hear the Gospel proclaimed and we bless Luther or Lutheranism or our church body or our parents and grandparents or even our pastors and other leaders. But in His never ending compassion our Lord graciously works to turn our hearts yet again to Himself. He says, **"No! Rather, blessed are those hearing Me and continuing in Me!"** In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.