

# GOSPEL FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Luke 11:14-28

*Now He was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," while others, to test Him, kept seeking from Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters. When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first." As He said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

1. This is a beautiful Gospel reading. In it we learn many different things. Nearly everything is set forth here about what Christ, His kingdom, and the Gospel are—both what they do and how they fare in the world. First, as all the Gospel readings do, it teaches us faith and love, for it presents Christ to us as a Savior and Helper in every need because of His great love. Whoever believes that is saved. Here we see that He had nothing to do with the healthy, but with this poor man who had a fourfold problem. He was blind, as Matthew says [Matt. 12:22], mute, and possessed, as Luke says [Luke 11:14]. Now all who are mute are also deaf, so that in Greek "deaf" and "mute" are the same word. In this way He attracts us to Himself, so that we should expect all good from Him and run to Him in every need. Then again also, according to the nature



of love, [this Gospel reading teaches us] to treat others as He has treated us. This is the common and most delightful doctrine of this and all the Gospel readings throughout the whole year.

This poor man did not come to [Christ] without the Word, for those who brought him to Christ must have heard tell about this love of Christ, by which they were moved to trust Him. Thus we learn that faith comes through the Word; but there has been enough about this elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

2. Second, it is pointed out here how Christ and the Gospel fare in the world, namely, that there are three kinds of hearers. [First,] some are astonished at Him; these are the godly and true Christians, who regard Him as so great that they are amazed at Him. [Second,] some slander Him, as did the Pharisees [Matt. 12:24] and scribes [Mark 3:22], who were annoyed because they could not do as much, and who worried that the people would regard Him as higher than themselves. [Third,] some tempt Him and want to have a sign, so that He would do what they want and so make it into an amusement, just as Herod desired from Christ [Luke 23:8].

But He answers both—first, the slanderers in this Gospel reading, and then the tempters—saying that no sign will be given to this evil generation except the sign of Jonah, the prophet, which is not part of this Gospel reading [Luke 11:29]. He answers the slanderers in a kind way and deals with five points against them.

3. First, with honest and reasonable arguments He concludes from two comparisons that one demon cannot cast out another, for if that were so, the demons would have to be divided against themselves, and Satan's kingdom would certainly not stand [Luke 11:17–18]. It is the nature of things that if a kingdom is divided against itself and is driving its citizens away, it is unnecessary to go to war against it, for it will go to ruin much quicker than through war. So also when a house is divided against itself, it does not need to be overthrown. So also the heathen Sallust, taught by nature and experience, says: "Great possessions fall to pieces through disunity, but through unity small possessions become great." If the demons were divided against themselves so much that one was casting out another, then his kingdom would be nothing, and we would have peace from them.

4. What could these slanderers have said to such clear arguments? Their mouth had been stopped, but their hearts were still hard, so that they did not ask about that. A hard heart will not be instructed, no matter how distinctly and clearly the truth is presented; but the faith of the godly is strengthened when they see that the basis of their faith is right and good. Just for that reason we must answer the hardened and shut their mouths. Even though they will not be converted nor keep quiet, it still serves the purpose of making

<sup>1</sup> See sermon for Quinquagesima on Luke 18:31–43.



their hardened folly obvious, for the longer they talk, the more foolish they become, so that we can understand that what they say does not retain even the appearance of being good and right. Solomon says, "Answer a fool, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Proverbs 26 [:5]); that is, answer him "according to his folly," so that [his folly] is confounded for the sake of others, so that they do not follow him and are not deceived, as if he were right. Otherwise, where you have no argument, it is better to keep quiet, as Solomon also says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself" (Proverbs 26 [:4]).

5. It also cannot be said here that the demons pretend to be divided against themselves and to yield to each other in order to deceive the people, for it is openly seen how they resist and defend themselves, cry out and rage, break loose and rave when they see how serious it is that they will be driven out. Then one must confess that they are opposed to Christ and His Spirit and not united with Him; to Him they yield unwillingly, but must yield. Therefore, nothing remains here but the openly slanderous lie—in which they are caught and confounded—when out of their poisonous hatred and jealousy they attribute God's work to the devil.

From that we learn not to be surprised when our doctrine and deeds are slandered and when hard hearts are not satisfied or converted, even though they are overcome by obvious truth and their mouths are shut. It is enough that their hardened folly is exposed, acknowledged, and shown to be nothing by our answer before the godly, so that they are not misled by its good appearance. Then let them go where they want, for they have their condemnation, as St. Paul says (Titus 3 [:11]).

6. Second, [He answers the slanderers] with an obvious example and a similar work when He says, "By whom do your sons cast them out?" [Luke 11:19]. It is as if He would say: "Is this not an obvious tyranny? Just what you praise in your sons, you condemn in Me. When your sons do it, it is of God; but when I do it, it must be of the devil." It must happen that way in the world. What Christ does is of the devil; if someone [else] were to do it, it would be correct. Our tyrants and enemies of the Gospel now do the same thing. They condemn in us what they themselves do and confess and teach. They must do that so that their judgment is publicly approved, though they are condemned with all justice.

These "sons," whom Christ says cast out demons, were (I think) certain exorcists among the people, for God had given this people various spiritual gifts from the beginning. He calls them their "sons" as if He would say: "I am God's Son and must be of the devil, but these who are your sons, born from you, do the same things and must not be of the devil."



7. "Therefore, they will also be your judges" [Luke 11:19]. That is, "I appeal to them. They will have to judge that you have unjustly slandered Me, and thus condemned yourselves." If one demon does not cast out another, then some other power must do it which is neither devilish nor human, but divine. For that reason He adds: "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is coming upon you" [Luke 11:20]. Matthew explains this "finger of God" as the Holy Spirit, for he has "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons" (Matthew 12 [:28]).

In summary, Christ wants to say: "If the kingdom of God is to come to you, then the devil must be cast out, for his kingdom is against God's kingdom, as you yourselves must confess." Now, people do not cast out the devil with the devil, much less with men or through human power, but only through God's Spirit and power.

8. The result is that wherever God's finger does not cast out the devil, the devil's kingdom is still there, and wherever the devil's kingdom is, God's kingdom is not. The unavoidable conclusion, then, is that as long as the Holy Spirit does not come into us, we are not only incapable of any good but also are, of necessity, in the devil's kingdom. But if we are in his kingdom, then we can do nothing other than what pleases him—otherwise it would not be called his kingdom. St. Paul says to Timothy that the people were captured in the snare of the devil to do his will [2 Tim. 2:26]. How could he tolerate one of his own people undertaking a thought to do something which is against his kingdom and not for his kingdom?

These are extremely dreadful words! Christ here grants to the devil a kingdom which cannot be avoided without the Spirit of God, and God's kingdom cannot come unless his kingdom is cast out of us with divine, heavenly power.

9. This is proved also by this poor man, who was possessed bodily by the devil. Tell me, what could he do, even with [the help of] all people on earth, to get free from the devil? Without a doubt, nothing. He would have to do and suffer whatever the devil, his master, wanted, until Christ came with God's power. Now look, if he could not free himself bodily from the devil, how could he free himself spiritually through his own power? The soul is the reason that the body is possessed as a punishment, because [the soul] is possessed through sin, and it is more difficult to get free of sin than from the punishment [of sin], and the soul is always more firmly possessed than the body. This is proved by the fact that the devil leaves the possessed body its natural powers and works, but he robs the soul of reason, judgment, common sense, understanding, and all its powers, as we can see in possessed people.

10. Third, [He answers the slanderers] with a comparison taken from our own experience, namely, when a strong man is overcome by someone



stronger, and his armor and goods are taken away [Luke 11:21-22]. Thus He testifies that no one can overcome the devil except God alone, and again that no one can boast that he himself can cast out either sin or the devil. Look at how he depicts the devil: He calls him a strong giant who guards his land and house. That is, the devil not only possesses the world as his own kingdom, but he also has preserved and established it, so that no one can take it from him. He possesses it also in peace, so that it does whatever he wants.

As much as a house or land can oppose the tyrant or restrain the one who possesses them, so much can free will and human power oppose both sin and the devil—namely, not at all. [The man] must be under them. As the house must be conquered by the stronger one and won from the tyrant, so man must also be redeemed through Christ and won from the devil. We see here again that our activity and righteousness helps nothing at all for our redemption, but it is only God's grace.

11. Fourth, [He answers the slanderers] with beautiful sayings and teachings, such as: "Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters" [Luke 11:23]. "The devil is not with Me, for I cast them out; thus he must certainly be against Me." But this saying applies not only to the devil but also to the slanderers whom He here convicts and condemns of being against Him because they are not with Him.

To be "with Christ" means to have the same mind and view as Christ, that is, to believe that Christ's works and not our works help us, for this is what Christ holds and teaches. But to "gather with Christ" means to do good through love and to become rich in good works. Whoever does not believe is by himself through his own works; he is not with Christ but against Christ, for he denies Christ by building on his own works. So also, whoever does not love does not gather with Christ, but does useless works through which he only becomes worse and goes further away from faith.

12. Fifth, [He answers the slanderers] with the threat that "the last state is always worse than the first" [Luke 11:26]. Therefore, observe that we should not only leave the Gospel and Christ unslandered—since He does such great things for us and casts the devil out of us—but also seriously and fearfully keep them, so that afterward seven worse demons do not possess us when only one did before [Luke 11:26]. This is what happened to the Jews, who had never been so bad as they were after the Gospel was proclaimed to them. Under the papacy we became seven times (that is, many times) worse heathen under the name of Christ than we had ever been before. St. Peter says that their "last state has become worse for them than the first" (2 Peter 2 [20]). If we neglect this great light which we now have, then we also will become worse than we were before, for the devil does not sleep. We have been sufficiently warned.



13. Finally, when the woman cries out and praises Christ that the mother who bore such a Son is blessed [Luke 11:27], He opposes her carnal devotion and teaches us all the summary of this Gospel reading, namely, that we should not gape at the works or merits of the saints, but much rather hear and keep the Word of God [Luke 11:28]. Nothing depends on how holy and worthy the mother of this Son is, nor are we helped by it, not even by how exalted the Son and the fruit is. Rather, [we are helped by] what this Son has done for us: that He has redeemed us through grace from the devil without our assistance and merit. This is proclaimed to us through the Word of God, which we should hear and hold in firm faith. Then we, too, will be blessed, like this mother and her Son.

Although this Word and work must be slandered, we should tolerate this and answer it with meekness, as St. Paul teaches, for the improvement of others.

## ALLEGORIES

14. This mute, deaf, blind, and possessed man represents all the children of Adam, who through their flesh are possessed by the devil in original sin, so that they must be his own and act according to his will. Therefore, they are also blind; that is, they do not know God. They are deaf, since they do not hear God's Word and are not obedient or subject to it. They are also mute, for they thank, praise, speak, and preach nothing about Christ and God's grace.

But they are all too talkative about the devil's teachings and worthless human inventions. There they see all too sharply and are more shrewd in their undertakings, opinion, and pleasure than the sons of light [Luke 16:8]. There they hear with both ears and accept everything flesh and blood think about. Thus all of our works, words, and life, both in body and soul, whether they are external holiness or sin, are of the devil and must be redeemed through God's work. He possesses us for His kingdom so that we will know Him; see, hear, and follow Him; and praise and preach Him. All of this happens through the Spirit of God in the Word of God, which casts out the devil with his kingdom.

15. The Jews call the chief demon "Beelzebub" [Luke 11:15]. "Zebub" in Hebrew means a fly, and "Baal" or "Beel" means a man or sovereign, such as a master of the house. When they come together as "Beelzebub," it means the archfly or the chief fly, or in plain German: the lord of the flies or the large horsefly. They gave Satan such a contemptible name, as if they were entirely free and secure before him and even his lords. That is what all secure, lazy hypocrites do, who think they are so pure and holy that the devil is a helpless, weak fly compared to them, so that they do not need Christ's grace and God's Word. Yet they think that [the devil] is strong enough for others—in



fact, that whatever God-fearing people teach and do must be from the devil. They regard him to be as helpless as if he were a weak fly. The devil can also gladly tolerate such contempt, under which he is yet higher in their hearts than the true God.

16. The tyrant in the yard or house is the devil, as was said. He sits there in peace, if God's Word and finger do not come against him through Christ. People do what he wants, for they do not know any better, just as this mute and deaf man did. His weapons and defense are the carnal opinions, doctrines, and principles with which he holds consciences and protects himself.

17. But when the stronger one, the Gospel, comes, his peace is over. He rages and becomes mad and does not want to be condemned, unmasked, punished, or pointed out. Then he rouses up his armor: the powerful, shrewd, rich, and holy people, whom he stirs up against God's Word, as we see in the persecution of the evangelical teachers. Such raging and persecution mean that the devil does not like to be cast out, and he rages in the whole body [cf. Luke 9:39, 42]. The way he acts in a body with its members when he is cast out is the way he acts in the whole world when he must yield to the Gospel: he stirs up all his powers, but it does not help him, for he must leave.

18. The stronger one who overcomes him is Christ. He takes away his armor, that is, He converts some of the persecutors [Acts 9:1-19], and so makes him weaker and His own kingdom stronger. He also divides the spoil [Luke 11:22]; that is, those He converts He uses for various offices, graces, and works in Christendom, about which Paul writes in Romans 12. He is also in the yard or on the porch, for the devil's kingdom exists in the outward appearance and glittering of wisdom, holiness, and strength; but when it is taken up by the Gospel, it is found to be only folly, sin, and without any strength.

19. "After the unclean spirit has gone out, it passes through dry places, seeking rest" [Luke 11:24]; that is (as people say), the devil does not take a vacation and does not sleep, but again seeks how he can capture people. "Dry places" are not godless hearts, for in them he rests and dwells like a strong tyrant, as the Gospel here says; rather, they are dry and desolate places here and there in the country where no people live, such as the wild and wildernesses. In malice and wrath he rushes to such places when he is cast out, just as the devil found Christ in the wilderness [Luke 4:1-13]. Now in the Jewish land there is not much water; He speaks about that here because it has a lot of dry wilderness. In other lands which are well watered, such as ours, the demons dwell in the waters and swamps, and sometimes drown people who bathe or travel in them. Likewise, in some places there are water nymphs, who entice children into the water and drown them; those are all demons.



20. "When it comes again, it finds the house swept and adorned" [Luke 11:25] (St. Matthew adds "idle" [Matt. 12:44]); that is, the man is sanctified and adorned with beautiful spiritual gifts, so that the evil spirit sees that he can do nothing more with his old tricks, since they are known. Similarly, after idolatry was cast out among the Gentiles, he no longer attacks the world with that. But what does he do? He undertakes something different, goes out, brings back seven worse spirits, goes in, and dwells there, so that "the last state is worse than the first" [Luke 11:26].

He has also done the same with us. When Christ had become known in the world and the devil's former kingdom with its idolatry had been destroyed, he undertook a different thing and attacked us with heresy, until he introduced and established the papacy, in which Christ was completely forgotten, and so people became worse heathen under the name of Christ, as we can see with our own eyes. So it also happened to the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem, and to the Greeks under the Turks, and it happens to all who hear God's Word and then become secure and lax in it, as St. Matthew says that he finds the house idle (Matthew [12:44]). He throws bad seed among the wheat at night when the people are sleeping (Matthew 13 [:25]). For that reason it is necessary that we be watchful, as the apostles everywhere admonish us to be, especially St. Peter: "Brothers, be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5 [:8]). Wherever he abolishes faith, he easily restores all former vices.