

Oculi with the Rite of Holy Baptism for Xariyah Jayne Slade

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St. Luke 11:14-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Saints of God,

How seriously do you take the devil and his demons? Have you relegated him to being nothing more than a boogey man, a fictional character that only exists in books in movies? Or do you acknowledge him but think of him only terms of the fantastic cases of demonic possession with spinning heads and talking in creepy voices? Has modern science and the material world sufficiently blinded us so that we don't really give Satan another thought? Be warned, Satan loves nothing more than to be ignored. He doesn't want you to think about him. He doesn't want you to identify his handiwork of death, sin, brokenness and unbelief. He wants to slip under your radar and sow his destructive seed of false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

We ignore and downplay Satan only to our eternal peril. You are in the midst of a fierce spiritual war and your soul is the prize. If you don't take your enemy seriously and daily, even hourly, take up the whole cache of weapons God gives, it's not a question of if but when you will be overcome. Alone we are completely unable to withstand Satan. How could we? He was able to overcome Adam and Eve in paradise, when their minds and wills were completely free from corruption. How well do you think you will fair when your sinful flesh is already a willing ally of Satan and longs to return to slavery, when your mind and judgment are clouded by sin and selfishness?

The Scriptures clearly teach us about Satan: he is a liar and murderer; he is the accuser; he is the tempter; he disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive; he adorns his evil work so that it looks beautiful and holy; he is constantly setting

traps and snares to catch us; he prowls about hunting us until we look away or set down our weapons. And he doesn't just know one way to attack. There is nothing out-of-bounds, nothing too cruel, no lie too great that he won't use it. He and his legions of fallen angels never grow weary. And, perhaps worst of all, they know the word of God backwards and forwards and how to masterfully manipulate it to scratch your itching ears.

But we learn something very important about our enemy in the text before us today. There are really only two weapons that Satan has in his arsenal, sin and death, but he knows infinite ways to use them. Both of these weapons are on display here in Luke. First, the obvious one, the demon who had caused the man to be mute. This physical affliction, which we would probably just chalk up to some strange medical condition and subject the poor man to all sorts of tests and drug therapies, is a fruit of death. ALL physical maladies are. There is no disease or brokenness of mind or body that afflicts humanity that isn't a direct result of the death and decay which sin has ushered into creation. Every hormone imbalance, every aching joint, every psychological disorder, every cold and flu, every cancerous cell and failing kidney simply wouldn't exist if sin weren't in the world ruling our flesh.

This is probably what we most often associate with demonic possession (and perhaps why we so quickly dismiss it). There wasn't any indication of anything more fantastic happening to this man other than the fact that he couldn't speak. There wasn't anything violent or grotesque. But Scripture clearly tells us that it was a demon, utilizing death, to silence this man. Of course, this isn't to say that every time you get a headache we need to perform an exorcism. That's one wrong extreme. The other is to dismiss the demonic completely and not recognize that Satan is in the business of disrupting life and health whenever he is able. Just look at Job and Paul. Here we err by turning ONLY to doctors and drugs and home remedies and not taking up the Word of God and prayer, not receiving the medicine of immortality which Christ gives in the Holy Communion. St. James urges "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the

prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” (James 5:14-15) Consequently, Satan uses those afflictions in order to lead us into sin and hopelessness. Satan is the one driving the question “Why is this happening to me?”

The second possession might not have been so obvious but its consequences were far worse. This possession is driven by the root of all evil, the greatest work and only goal of Satan - unbelief. Those who saw Jesus overthrow the first demon by His Word and free the man from his affliction, refused to acknowledge the presence and work of God. Driven by demons far worse than mute, the unbelieving bystanders condemned themselves by refusing Jesus and even blaspheming Him by calling Him a servant of Beelzebul, the lord of the flies. The irony is, of course, that the very thing they accused Jesus of, they themselves were guilty of. They were, in fact, speaking on behalf of the fly lord, spewing out their blasphemous dung.

This second possession is the one we need to be more concerned about because it is so much more insidious, easier to disguise, and far more difficult to drive out. This is what leads to Jesus’ warning. Indeed, Satan is a strong man. With the mighty sword of God’s Law, Satan attacks us driving us into sin and rebellion. Then he shackles us with the Law’s righteous condemnation and stands guard over us to ensure that we die under God’s wrath. And we certainly stand no chance of overcoming him. Our flesh stands always at the ready, willing to serve the devil according to its passions and lusts. We have no strength in and of ourselves. “With might of ours can naught be done/ Soon were our loss effected.” And so we remain the devil’s captives unless someone stronger than Satan goes to battle for us.

“But for us fights the valiant one/ Whom God Himself elected./ Jesus Christ it is...” The strong man has come! Though Satan assaults you on every side and you are helpless to stop him, Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God incarnate has taken on your sinful flesh in order to take away Satan’s weapons of sin and death. Jesus has come to fight the fight you and I could never hope to win because our

condemnation is just. Our works, filled with all sorts of evil intentions and lacking the perfect love demanded by God's Law, are the dung hill ruled by the lord of the flies. But in His pure and spotless flesh, Jesus, the Lord who rules over all things in heaven and earth, has willingly born the full condemnation of your sins. He has endured the accusation and punishment of the Law, offering His Body and Blood as ransom to set you free. His weapon was the love and mercy of the Father for sinners who took no pleasure in seeing you rot for eternity in hell's fiery dungeon.

Satan has been disarmed. He has nothing left with which to accuse you. Your sins have been laid on Jesus and you have been washed clean. Your exorcism took place the day you were Baptized and the Holy Spirit of God took up residence in you. You are a child of God's kingdom. This is the work of Baptism. It drives out demons by the finger of God. Today, like us, Xariyah was freed from her demonic captures. She was transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's light. We would do well to follow Luther's baptismal rite which retained the words of exorcism - "Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit." These words hold forth the great truth that we are ruled either by Christ and His Spirit or by the devil. There is no alternative. Xariyah was cleansed of the devil and is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of all that is good and right and true. The Word of God which He has joined to the water has rescued Xariyah and us from Beelzebul's iron grip.

And it is only by this same Word that we keep the unclean spirit and his friends from returning and possessing us for Satan again. As you hear Christ's Word, as you receive His absolution and feast on His Flesh and drink His Blood you are protected. No matter how Satan rages and seeks to steal you back, you are protected by the stronger man who cannot be overcome. Let your whole faith and confidence rest in Him because in Him you are blessed.

But don't be foolish. Jesus 'speaks this warning today to you. The Word of God in Holy Baptism unseated Satan as your lord and you were brought into the gracious kingdom of God. Satan won't give up. Day and night he will plot and plan how to steal you back. But he won't do it by force. He's too smart for that.

He knows how it is that the Lord defends and protects you. He knows the whole armor that you have been given. He knows that it was the Word of God in the flesh that overthrew him and he knows that only the Word of God can hold him at bay and extinguish the fiery darts of worry, bitterness, apathy, covetousness, and unbelief that he constantly launches at you.

Therefore it is the Word of God which the devil will seek to rob you of. Blessed is the one who hears the Word of God and guards it with every fiber of his being. You have been freed and made righteous by the absolving Word of God and it is that same Word of God that defends and keeps you, that continues to disarm the enemy when he charges with shouts of “Sinner! You deserve death! God blesses only holy and righteous people.”; when he whispers into your ear promises of pleasure if you will only follow your feelings and your desires; when he seeks to overwhelm you with suffering and pain and convince you that God has removed His mercy from you and can no longer help you.

Against these assaults there is only one thing that will stand, one thing that will route the enemy and send him skulking back into the dark abyss of hell - the Word of Christ’s forgiveness which the Lord proclaims to you and delivers to you in the Holy Communion. Satan must be silent before the Blood of Jesus. That Blood has robbed the devil of every accusation against you and taken away the armor in which he trusted. That Blood, now risen from the dead has taken away the sting of death. The Blood of Jesus that stains your lips has definitively declared you forgiven of all your sins. With that and that alone you will be able to drive off every legion of Satan’s demons.

In the hour of temptation, cling to God’s promises. In the midst of sorrow, behold the living Christ. In the face of death behold the Son of God hanging on Calvary’s cross dying your death for you and opening the gates of eternal life. In the hour of despair, return to your Baptism and hear the Father say “You are my beloved child, with you I am well-pleased.” “Though devils all the world should fill/ All eager to devour us/ We tremble not, we fear no ill;/ They shall not overpower us./ And take they our life/ Goods, fame, child, and wife/ Though these all be gone,/ Our vict’ry

has been won;/ The Kingdom ours remaineth.” Do not set down your weapons. Do not imagine that you can defeat sin, Satan, and death without and apart from the Word of Christ. You will be consumed. Instead, arm yourselves and your family because the fighting is fierce and the warfare is long. But the Word of God endures forever and assures you of victory.

In the Name of +Jesus.