

The Third Sunday of Lent 19 March 2017

“He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters.”

Lk. 11: 23

Today, the Church cautions us in both the Epistle (*Ephesians* 5:1-9) and Gospel (Luke 11:14-28) to choose Christ and reject evil. Many people compromise the teachings of the Church for their own convenience and inevitably suffer tragic consequences. Msgr. Patrick Boylan comments on the widespread sinfulness of our time: **“On all sides one hears the voices raised against every attempt to check the growth of profligacy, every effort to restrict evil amusements and evil literature. We hear constantly of the ‘sacred rights,’ of freedom—freedom, that is, to disregard the moral code, to follow the blind guidance of passion, to satisfy every form of curiosity, to see everything, to read everything. Popular literature is full of the ‘empty words’ with which all that is seductive to sense is represented as innocent because it is ‘natural,’ or ‘healthy,’ or because it ‘develops the personality!’”** (*The Sunday Epistles and Gospels*, p. 191) To counteract the spirit of the world, that Msgr. Boylan indicates, St. Paul warns us of the dangers of worldliness: **“Let no one lead you astray with empty words; for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience.”** Eph. 5:6. In the gospel, Jesus is even more emphatic as He condemns the leaders of the Jews for allying themselves with Satan. **“He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters.”** Lk. 11:23. Those who are with Christ are in the light; those who choose sin and evil are children of darkness and Satan.

“Walk, then, as children of light.” Eph. 5:8

In today’s *Epistle to the Ephesians*, St. Paul reminds his converts to live according to the light of Christ. Hitherto, they were in the darkness of uncleanness and sin. Now they are to be imitators of Christ who sacrificed Himself for them and is a sweet odour to God: **“...walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God to ascend in fragrant odour.”** Eph. 5:2 St. Paul warns the Ephesians about immorality and uncleanness: **“But**

immorality and every uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becomes saints: or obscenity, or foolish talk or scurrility, which are out of place;” Eph. 5:3-4 Those who choose these sins will have no place with Christ: **“For know this and understand, that no fornicator, or unclean person, or covetous one (for that is idolatry) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”** Eph. 5:5 Although St. Paul does not mention the devil by name, it is easy to see that those who choose evil are with the devil and not with Christ.

Two Kingdoms

In today’s gospel from St. Luke, Jesus casts out the devil from a man who was dumb; St. Matthew has the man both blind and dumb. **“The Fathers, joining the two, make this man into one of the most unhappy beings one could imagine, blind, dumb and possessed by Satan... Spiritually, this man represents the soul in sin. He who might have been a son of God is now possessed by the devil; blind to the light of truth and dumb so far as singing the praises of God is concerned.”** (*The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia: Lent and Eastertide*, p. 121). Those who do not believe in Jesus and accuse him of casting out the devil because He is a devil are themselves of the kingdom of the devil. After the miracle, some of those present (the Pharisees in St. Matthew’s gospel) said: **“By Beelzebub, the prince of devils, he casts out devils.”** Lk. 11:15 Jesus reads their thoughts and shows them the unreasonableness of these words: **“... Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and house will fall upon house. If, then, Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand.”** Lk. 11: 17-8. Jesus then goes on to tell them the parable of the strong man: **“But if I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When the strong man, fully armed, guards his courtyard, his property is undisturbed. But if a stronger than he attacks and overcomes him he will take away all his weapons that he relied upon and will divide his spoils.”** Lk. 11:20-22. This stronger man is Jesus Christ who has come to conquer the kingdom of Satan and all his followers. Those who believe in Christ belong to His kingdom; those who do not believe in Jesus and deny His miraculous power belong to the kingdom of Satan.

Returning to Mortal Sin

Very few souls realize the dire consequences of returning to one's sins after the devil has been expelled either by an exorcism or a good confession: *"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he roams through waterless places in search of rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house which I left.' And when he has come to it, he finds the place swept. Then he goes and takes seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."* Lk. 11:24-26. Dom Prosper Gueranger in his book, *The Liturgical Year, Vol. 5*, comments on this passage: *"But the enemy of mankind never despairs of regaining his prey. His hatred is as active now as it was in the very beginning of the world, and he says, 'I will return into my house, whence I came out.'* Nor will he come alone. He is determined to conquer; and therefore, he will if he thinks it needed, take with him seven other spirits, even more wicked than himself. What a terrible assault is being prepared for the poor soul, unless she be on the watch, and unless the peace, which was granted her, be one that is well armed for war! Alas! With many souls the very contrary is the case; and our Saviour describes the situation in which the devil finds them on his return: they are swept and garnished, and that is all! No precautions, no defence, no arms. One would suppose that they were waiting to give the enemy admission. Then Satan, to make his repossession sure, comes with a sevenfold force. The attack is made; but there is no resistance, and straightways the wicked spirits entering in, dwell there; so that the last state becometh worse than the first; for before there was but one enemy and now there are many." Gueranger, p. 251

The Kingdom of God

Those who believe in Jesus cry out in praise of Jesus like the woman who praises the mother of Jesus: *"Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee."* Lk. 11:27 Jesus shows that this is true of His Mother especially because she is obedient: *"Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."* Lk. 11:28. Those who believe in God and keep His commandments belong to His kingdom. These believers will enter His kingdom as they gather graces for eternal life by their faithful obedience.

"Therefore I say to you, that every kind of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" Mt. 12:31

In St. Matthew's gospel account of the miracle of casting out the devil from the blind and dumb man, Jesus says: *"Therefore I say to you, that every kind of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven"* Mt. 12:31 This is the sin by which a person refuses to acknowledge his sin, and, therefore, will not be forgiven. This is what the Pharisees do in today's gospel. They blaspheme by saying, *"By Beelzebub, the prince of devils, he casts out devils."* Lk. 11:15. They refuse to see the good that Jesus does and accuse Him of evil. If they had acknowledged Jesus' miracle, they too would have been cured like the dumb man. St. Jerome tells us: *"Three miracles in one man; the blind sees, the dumb speaks and the possessed finds himself free of the devil a thing which also happens in the case of those who begin to believe and who, once the devil has been cast out, receive the light and the faith opening their lips in the praises of God."*

Sins against the Holy Spirit

Other sins against the Holy Spirit are: 1. Presumption, 2. Despair, 3. Resisting the known truth, 4. Envy of another's spiritual good, 5. Obstinacy in sin, 6. Final impenitence. (*The Penny Catechism*, p. 54) Those who are guilty of these sins have hardened their hearts against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and refuse to see their sins because of their pride. This is the reprobate sense that St. Paul speaks of in the Epistle to the Romans: *"And as they have resolved against possessing the knowledge of God, God has given them up to a reprobate sense, so that they do what is not fitting, being filled with all iniquity, malice, immorality, avarice, wickedness; being full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity; being whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, irreverent, proud, haughty, plotters of evil; disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy."* Rom. 1: 28-32. This final state of the reprobate sinner is a state that will take a miracle of grace to overcome. This is why Our Lady said at Fatima, *"Many souls go to hell because no one prays and sacrifices for them."* Let us pray our rosary every day and sacrifice so that many sinners can be saved.

Addenda

Why the Rosary is so important!

“Give me an army saying the Rosary and I will conquer the world.” Pope Blessed Pius IX

“If you persevere in reciting the Rosary, this will be a most probable sign of your eternal salvation.” Blessed Alan de la Roche

“The greatest method of praying is to pray the Rosary.” Saint Francis de Sales

“When the Holy Rosary is said well, it gives Jesus and Mary more glory and is more meritorious than any other prayer.”
Saint Louis de Montfort

“The Holy Rosary is the storehouse of countless blessing.” Blessed Alan de la Roche

“One day, through the Rosary and the Scapular, Our Lady will save the world.” Saint Dominic

“If you say the Rosary faithfully unto death, I do assure you that, in spite of the gravity of your sins, *‘you will receive a never-fading crown of glory’* (1 St. Peter 5:4).” Saint Louis de Montfort

“You must know that when you say ‘hail’ Mary, she immediately greets you! Don’t think that she is one of those rude women of whom there are so many—on the contrary, she is utterly courteous and pleasant. If you greet her, she will answer you right away and converse with you!” Saint Bernardine of Siena