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C.S. Lewis in his book, the Screwtape Letters, writes of a fictional conversation between a senior and junior demon. In one passage in particular, the senior demon, Screwtape, encourages the junior demon to continue leading his human subject into a host of small sins. He writes, *You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.*

The last couple of Sundays in Lent it seems that our lessons have finally come to that topic that has been in the back of our minds this season, namely of the demonic. We are taught this Lent that we are up against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We spend this season fasting and praying so that we can get the upper hand, and spiritually purify ourselves, to cast off the sins that weigh us down, as we approach the glory of Easter. But all of this seems outdated as we live in a culture that either completely denies the existence of fallen angels and Satan or believes that they are under every rock and bush. Scripture gives us a right view of what we should think about it all, which we see when we compare the Gospel to the Epistle.

In the Gospel, we find that spectacular wickedness Wormwood would have liked to have caused. Jesus is casting out a devil, He is performing an exorcism, the most extreme form of diabolic activity, and what we probably all think of when we think of Satan's influence in a life. But as we see in the warning from St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, and as illustrated by the Screwtape Letters, it is not the extreme of possession that we must worry about, but giving into all the mundane, small sins that we think of as nothing. It is the same old tactic that Satan has used since Adam and Eve's Fall in the Garden, whatever sin it was, symbolized by the eating of the tree God had forbidden them to eat from, seemed like just a small thing. This is the very kind of reasoning Satan used with Eve, *Did God really say you cannot eat from this tree? And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die.* They reasoned that they could only stand to benefit from what would just be a small act of disobedience to God.

After all, who can blame them if they were told that if they disobeyed just a little bit, they would be like gods, their eyes would be opened, and they would know good and evil. But the serpent, as he does with all the sins he tempts us with, told a half-truth. The eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, but instead of opening their eyes to joy and pleasure, they opened their eyes to fear. They had evening walks in the Garden of Eden daily with God, and now they hid themselves from Him. They certainly did know good and evil though, they knew now that they had sinned, that they had turned their backs on the good things of the Garden and incredible fellowship with God, to what they now learned to be the empty logic of sin. Poor Adam and Eve, it almost seems as if they were harder on themselves and on each other than God Almighty was. God knew what they had done, and yet like a loving father He still came down to find them and talk to them. He explained what was to happen now that they had disobeyed. And most importantly He promised them that they would one day be redeemed. God cursed the serpent, Satan, and said, *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

In the meantime, we might share more with Adam and Eve than we care to admit, and think that there really is nothing wrong with a little bit of uncleanness, or covetousness, or a little bit of dirtiness, foolish talking or jesting. St. Paul says these are not convenient, or not fitting to a life claimed by Christ, while some might think that surely these things never hurt anyone, especially when compared to the big sins like idolatry and fornication. But St. Paul does not mean here for us to classify sins as big or small, or serious and less serious. His point, along with Screwtape's point, is that the descent into serious sin, even into hell is often by the accumulation of a lot of small sins, which edge us away from the Light of Christ, onto *the safest road to Hell [which] is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.*

Likewise, for many of the greatest Christians the Church celebrates, they found that the road to heaven was paved many little acts of virtue, charity, and surrender to God's will. St. Therese of Lisieux, known for her little way to heaven who was inspired to be a saint, but never believed that she could be a great saint, said, *I must bear with myself and my many imperfections; but I will seek out a means of getting to Heaven by a little way—very short and very straight, a little way that is wholly new.* And yet, it is by this little way to heaven, that this

young woman became one of the greatest saints of the modern era. This unassuming, sickly young nun writes some of the most profound and simple statements of the Christian life, among them that we should, *miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love...for...Jesus does not demand great actions from us, but simple surrender and gratitude...as holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be.* St. Therese's little way to heaven revolved around a life hidden in Christ, nourished by the Sacraments of the Church, and living that out in her every day life, even through the smallest of chores and duties.

It is a sobering prospect to consider this morning, if indeed those things we consider our little bad habits, our bad tempers, and negative dispositions are not leading us to that road which will take us down into spiritual death and away from the light of Christ. Are we giving place to our own Screwtape's and Wormwood's? Or are we giving every moment of the day, even every little action as an act of love to God? It is important that we take the time to consider this today. As St. Paul writes, *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:) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.* It is a slippery slope; therefore, we are to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness* but rather reprove them. We are not powerless in our struggle against the enemy, for God's promise of redemption in the Garden of Eden has come true, and will come true, the serpent's head has not been bruised but crushed by the Cross of Jesus Christ.

This morning, we are given another opportunity to clean, sweep and garnish our souls through receiving the body and blood of the Son of God. We are given another opportunity to guard our souls, to give no dwelling place to the world, the flesh, or the devil, to keep our hearts, minds, and souls open to receive the Word of God and keep it. Amen.