

*Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.*

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I had a philosophy professor in college who was an atheist, and yet took it upon himself to teach St. Augustine's City of God. In the course of his lectures he made awful claims that Satan is equal to God, that God created evil, and that Christianity was really a never ending battle between a Good God and a bad god, Satan. The Christians in my class were shocked that our professor would make such a claim, and even tried to gently correct him, and in doing so all of his claims and arguments came crashing down. This professor is a surprising example of someone who believes the lie that Satan wants everyone to believe, that he is equal to God and that he is just as powerful as God. My former professor, who we expected to understand the theology of St. Augustine, was not alone in falling for this lie. For we see in today's Gospel, and in the Old Testament lesson that this lie is as old as the Fall itself.

We hear a form of this lie from the Pharisees in today's Gospel, *He casts out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils*. Which means that either Jesus is Himself Satan, or He is equal to Satan. Why would they say this? Which is more convenient for the Pharisees? Should they give up their authority and influence to Jesus Christ, a poor rabbi from a "middle-of-no-where backwater town" of Judea, or to say He is Himself possessed. Or should they sow doubt in the hearts of His followers, and then to urge them to betray Him. They want to persuade people to think that Jesus is special only in so far as He could be equal to Satan. They present the old lie in a new way. Jesus casts out demons by the power of Satan, they maintain. Others ask Him to prove His divinity to them. Are we surprised though? In Genesis 3, Satan plants the seeds of doubt into Eve's heart, *you shall not surely die, if you eat of this forbidden fruit you shall be as God. God is trying to trick you into not eating this fruit so that you will not be like Him*. Satan has no place or authority to speak to Eve. By deigning to speak to Eve, he sets himself up to be like God. But, of course, this was what cast Satan, or Lucifer out of heaven. There is no room in heaven for anyone who thinks they are *equal to the Most High God*.

It is interesting to note though, that Satan, Eve, even the Pharisees, are all beings who had heard the word of God, straight from God Himself. Satan, when he was an angel in heaven's courts named Lucifer -meaning *light bearer*, had heard the word of God straight from the throne of God. Adam and Eve had heard the word of God from God Himself as they went on their evening walks with Him in the

Garden of Eden. The Pharisees had heard the Word of God, read to them in the synagogues, in the Temple, and now from the mouth of Jesus Christ, who they could not understand to be God in the flesh. Satan, Adam and Eve, and the Pharisees had heard the Word of God, but did not keep it, they did not store it up in their heart, they did not meditate on it, but cast it aside. Satan cast the word of God aside in favor of his pride. Adam and Eve allowed the word of God to be twisted and they fell from grace. The Pharisees heard the word of God, they knew it by heart, but it became corrupted by their pride in their rituals and the Law.

But there is one person in Scripture who *heard the Word of God and kept it*. This would be the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is what is meant when a lady in the crowd says, *blessed is the womb that bore thee*, blessed is your mother, and Jesus responds, *yea blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it*. This is true blessedness. It is not hereditary, it is not because of any special talents or gifts. The Blessed Virgin was not significant by reason of any blood-line, lineage, or social superiority. She was blessed because she *heard the Word of God and kept it*. True blessedness comes from hearing the word of God, obeying His commandments, and writing His words on our hearts. It comes from taking Mary as our example, who stored up all the words of Jesus, all the mysteries of His life in her heart, and meditated upon them. She hid the word of God in her heart and was not led astray when she was tried by her Son's crucifixion and death. All the sorrows that the Blessed Virgin Mary endured during her life further purified her heart, and remember that her life was bound to the life of her Son as a mother. It was because of how she responded to the sorrows that she endured that helped prepare her heart to receive the Word of God and to keep it undefiled.

Do we *hear the word of God and keep it*? We cannot fully *hear the word of God and keep it* if we have given room in our hearts to anything that is opposed to the Gospel. St. Paul reminds us, we must cast out pride, vanity, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, lust of the flesh and of the world, or any other idols. We are called to be *the children of light*, to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*. These are all things that can twist and bend the word of God until it is unrecognizable. This is why the Church encourages us to take steps this Lent to root up and cast out anything in our hearts that may be keeping us from truly hearing the Word of God, from treasuring it in our hearts. The Church wants to open our deaf ears, to loosen our mute tongues to the glory and praise of God.

The Church wants to keep us from falling for the old lie, that Satan is equal to God, that Satan is somehow equal to Jesus. The Gospel reminds us that Jesus

casts out and defeats Satan not with long prayers and fasting but by His Will. The power of Jesus Christ is unmatched. All that remains is that we allow Him to transform our hearts. To clean out what impedes the Word of God from taking root in our hearts. We begin this process anew this morning through listening and meditating on the Words of the Gospel that we hear this morning at Mass, and through receiving devoutly the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May it strengthen and encourage us this morning to take up our Lenten disciplines again this week. Amen.