

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Third Sunday in Lent (2022) (Oculi)**

**Defending Christianity against the Slanderers**

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***“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.” (Luke 11:17–18, ESV)***

The inspired Word of God given us this morning in the Gospel of Luke, is an eye opening and faith strengthening Word. In that Word, God opens our eyes to the power of Satan to enslave us, while also opening our hearts to the greater power of Christ free us that slavery. The Gospel Reading also warns us against slander, division, and apostasy, and then it closes with the wonderful reminder that one is blessed by God by remaining in His Word. So there is much to learn from this event recorded by St. Luke, all of which emanated from a miracle performed by Jesus on a man who was mute.

Now one would think that those observing such a wonderful event would praise our Lord for His good work, but instead they slander Him. This is quite puzzling until we remember who these are denigrating Christ and His miraculous healing. These are the Pharisees who are jealous of our Lord’s popularity and who, according to St. Matthew, ***“went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.” (Matthew 12:14, ESV)*** These are those who ***“loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” (John 12:43, ESV)*** and ***“who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” (Luke 18:9, ESV)*** So, out of contempt for Jesus, they slander Him, saying, ***“He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” (Luke 11:15–16, ESV)***

To attribute the power of Christ to the power of Satan is to blaspheme Jesus and the Holy Spirit who anointed Him at His Baptism, thereby identifying Jesus as the promised One who will perform the work of justification for all men, minister to smoldering wicks, and bring hope and comfort to all who believe in His name. Those hearing the accusation against Jesus, cannot help but hear that the work of Jesus is satanic. So once again, we hear from the lips of the Pharisees, the taunting question of Satan in the wilderness, ***“If you are the Son of God!”***

Accused of doing the devils work, Jesus, defends Himself, turning to face His accusers, He says, ***“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.” (Luke 11:17–20, ESV)***

Thus, Jesus asks, how is it that you say I am in league with the devil? Why would the devil fight against himself? This man was possessed by a demon, a follower of Satan, why would the devil want him cast out? Why would he want to tear down what he has built? Indeed, even some of you cast out demons in my name (Luke 9:49; Acts 19:13-17). Therefore, as you have accused Me should you not also accuse your own of casting out demons by Beelzebul? Yes, you should. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, that which performed miracles in Egypt and which wrote the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, why accuse Me of being in league with the devil?

Rather than accuse Me, shouldn't you give all glory to God, for these healings are His work performed through Me. Do you not know that you are standing in the very presence of God? Look, ***“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.” (Luke 11:21–22, ESV)***

The image our Lord paints reminds His hearers that there is a battle between Jesus and the devil, a battle which is ongoing. What they just witnessed was His power over Satan. Through the Word of God He overcomes the devil, defeating him by rescuing a poor man who had been taken captive by one of his demons. Casting out the demon, liberating his captive, was a vivid demonstration of our Lord's power over Satan. Furthermore, the battle will conclude with His final victory over Satan on the Altar of the Cross as He fulfills the songs of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, pouring out His life as the final offering for the sins of the world.

Jesus has just encountered opposition to what could only be considered as loving in His healing of the mute, but should this surprise us? I think not. These same enemies who oppose Him also oppose His Word of the Gospel, that Word which rescues all who hear it from the crippling effects of sin. Moreover, that same Word of the Gospel encounters great opposition today. Therefore, Jesus says, wake up, for, ***“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” (Luke 11:23, ESV)*** A little later in St. Luke's gospel, Jesus says, ***“I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8–9, ESV)*** So wake up all you who call yourselves followers of Christ, for like Jesus you, too, must be in the service of *Defending Christianity against the Slanderers*. Like Jesus, you must be an apologist for the faith.

An apologist? What is a Christian apologist? A Christian apologist is one who engages in Christian apologetics. Apologetics does not mean to apologize, that is to be sorry for being a Christian; rather, it means to defend the faith delivered to the saints. St. Jude appeals to us, saying, ***“I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed ... ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3-4 ESV).***

Apologetics means to defend the doctrine of God's Word, in all circumstances. When you are engaged in discussing Christian doctrine, you are called upon by our Lord Jesus to defend the Word of His Father, that Word given you in Holy Scripture. When you are confronted by the ways of the world, which are contrary to the Word of God, you are called upon to defend God's Word, thereby, refuting false doctrine! So the question under consideration this morning is, are you living your life *Defending Christianity against the Slander of the world*, are you committed to defending your faith, standing for the truth of Holy Scripture, or are you simply an apologist, apologizing and making excuses for your faith? Are you willing to allow others to denigrate and blaspheme our Lord, our faith, and His Church, or are you with the Lord, acknowledging Him before men?

Jesus asks, ***“If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?” (Luke 11:18, ESV)*** This is true of so many things in life, especially the church. Can there be true koinonia, true communion, when the Word of God is not taught in all its truth and purity and the Sacraments are not distributed according to God's divine will. The past five centuries have taught us that without true unity of doctrine, the church will be divided. Some will be true followers of Christ while others will not, yet still call themselves members of the Christian church. But such has been the case since the beginning.

In life there are two paths, one leads to Jesus and eternal life the other leads to Satan and eternal death. Through the Gospel Jesus calls you to follow Him to eternal freedom, and by enticing you through works of the flesh, Satan invites you to eternal slavery. Man by nature desires to be his own god, but if one knows and keeps the truth of God's Word, they will cast aside their natural desire and follow Jesus. Here is where you as an apologist come in.

Throughout your daily activity you encounter those who do not believe or who are not of the faith. Such as these are easily recognized by their life choices. Today's secular society, devoid of God's Word, is overcome with following Satan and the works of the flesh. But Holy Scripture tells us we are not to live that way. You are not to live according to works of the flesh which are evident in society, ***“sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”*** St. Paul reminds you, ***“I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** (Galatians 5:19–21, ESV) Therefore, when you encounter such works encourage those who engage in those activities to refrain from them, telling them they are sins against God, sins which will cost them their eternal soul. Oh, I know, it isn't easy to confront a friend or colleague with the truth, but remember, your words of warning may well be used by the Holy Spirit to awaken them to the danger their life choices place them in, and your words of comfort and mercy in Christ may well be used by the Holy Spirit to turn their hearts to God in repentance, delivering God's gracious gift of faith. Then, according to the words of Jesus, you have made a disciple and gained a brother. (Matthew 18:15; 28:19)

As for false doctrine and false worship, these abominations are all around. Syncretism and unionism flourish within the Christian community and they are contrary to Scripture. Furthermore, the ancient heresies of Pelagianism and Arianism run rampant within the church today. Indeed, a house of worship that claims to honor God but has no room for Christ is in fact a ***“synagogue of Satan”*** (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) Like every person, every house of worship has its occupant, either Christ or Beelzebul.

To be a disciple of Christ and an apologist for the faith you first realize who you are, a member of the one true Church: the church of Luther and Chemnitz, Augustine and Athanasius, Justin and Ignatius, Peter, and Paul. The Church, ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”*** (Ephesians 2:20–21, ESV) You are a member of that holy temple.

Thus you defend that membership knowing that you were recreated in Christ Jesus by the finger of God in the blessed waters of Baptism. In those blessed waters you were raised from death to life, adopted by God and made a child of His, robed in the very righteousness of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ and promised eternal life. As you grew in the faith, you were catechized in six chief parts of the Christian faith that you may stand ready, steadfast, and certain in your defense of the one, true Christian and apostolic church, standing ready to defend the Trinity: to defend God who alone is the Creator who has made you and all creatures, given you your body and soul, eyes and ears, and all your members, reason, and senses while defending you against all danger and evil, you are to defend the Son who alone is the Redeemer, who is begotten from the Father from all eternity and yet is also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, who has redeemed you, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death, and that He has risen from the dead and lives for all eternity, and you are to defend the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier, who alone brought you to faith, thus it is not by your reason or strength, but only by His call through the Gospel, that He has enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified you and kept you in the true faith. And on the last day He will raise you

and all believers to eternal life. You are to defend the truth of our Lord's body and blood in, under, and with the bread and wine of Holy Communion given and shed for the forgiveness of your sin. And you are to stand ready to defend the sacrament of Absolution passed on by Christ to His apostles and thus the church. Again, this is not an easy task, but it is what you affirmed at your confirmation when you pledged to continue steadfast in this confession and in the Church suffering all, even death, rather than fall away. A mighty confession, one that God expects you to keep. But more importantly, one that has made you a Christian apologist, one responsible for *Defending Christianity against Slanderers*.

Jesus expects you to do what He did as He stood strong, defending His action and His relationship with the Father. So impressed was one woman in the crowd that she cried out, ***"Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"*** However, Jesus reminded her, ***"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*** (Luke 11:27–28, *ESV*) Indeed, Mary, the mother of God, was blessed. Jesus does not deny the truth of this blessing proclaimed by the woman. However, Mary was simply a servant of the Lord. (Luke 1:38) Jesus loved His earthly mother, but for those who are his true mother and true brothers, Jesus says they, ***"are those who hear the word of God and do it."*** (Luke 8:21, *ESV*) Through the Word Satan is cast out and Christ takes up residence in people's hearts, so that men are made children of God.

The kingdom has arrived, God is present in Christ, and God is present in you by the indwelling Spirit of God. Go and be a Christian Apologist, *Defending Christianity against Slanderers*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.