

Lent III 2024  
Saint Patrick's  
3/3/2024

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. *Amen.*

From the Gospel: “... **if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.**”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

There are many topics about which I very much enjoy preaching.

For example, the Annunciation, the Nativity, our Lord’s Baptism, the Resurrection, and the Ascension are all wonderful topics and ones about which I love to preach.

They are unadulterated good news!

Even the Passion is at least mixed news.

The horror of the events is difficult to even think about, let alone preach about; however, there is also that wonderful, good news; “God so loved the world.”

But there are some topics I would rather avoid, if possible.

Today’s topic, demons, is one of those topics.

It is very difficult to find anything much to talk about in that topic which is in the least enjoyable or even comfortable.

Left to my own devices, I would seldom, if ever, preach a sermon about demons.

It is a good thing we have a lectionary.

Preachers, if they have the slightest degree of integrity, are forced to deal with topics which they, and probably most of their congregations, find difficult or unpleasant.

So, the obvious question would be, “why did the compilers (not authors, please) of the Book of Common Prayer, and of the older liturgies upon which it was based, moved of the Spirit to include such a nasty topic?”

To being to answer that question, we must begin by defining the term “demon.”

Demons, also called devils, are malevolent created spiritual beings.

Demons are of the same order of being as angels; a demon or devil is simply put, an evil angel.

They seek to corrupt, possess, and, if possible, destroy humans; they hate us.

As angelic beings they are both intelligent and powerful.

Of course, they were not created evil, everything God created was created good.

The fall of the demons or devils is spoken of in Revelation,

**“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”** (Rev. 12:7-9)

It seems this war was a rebellion, a civil war, if you will, which took place before the creation of humans.

In Job, God says to Job,

**4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.**

**5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?**

**6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;**

**7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”**

There is no indication of disunity here, “all the sons of God (which I take to be the angels) shouted for joy.”

Some theologians have speculated the rebellion of Satan, and his angels was brought about when they found out about God’s plans for the Incarnation.

According to this idea, Satan’s pride was such he could not tolerate the idea of bowing the knee to a human being, even if that human was also God the Son.

Another possible source of Satan’s anger was the idea Christians would one day judge the angels; Paul wrote: **“Know ye not that we shall judge angels?”** (1 Corinthians 6:3)

For a supremely proud being, the idea of being judged by mere mortals must have been totally unacceptable.

Whatever the reason for their revolt, it failed, and Satan and his evil angels were cast out of heaven.

Here, they seek to seduce men into sin, and to imitate their own rebellion against God.

The first and most successful seduction was that of Adam and Eve, of course.

Once again, pride played a major role in the Fall.

In Genesis, we are told of Eve’s temptation:

**“2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:  
3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.  
4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:  
5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.  
6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”** (Genesis 3:2-6)

We know how that worked out.

There are two points to be made here.

First, Eve's first sin was not the eating of the fruit, her first sin was to try to improve on what said.

God did not say anything about touching the tree, he said not to eat the fruit.

By lying about what God said, she opened herself up to the Devil's temptation.

The point being, when we quote scripture, we need to be very, very careful not to try to improve on it by adding our own ideas.

But the central focus of Satan's temptation is **"ye shall be as gods."**

What could more appeal to a human's pride than the offer of divinity?

Of course, this points out another aspect of Satan's temptations.

He was offering to give her something God was already planning to give, (what else can you call a human with eternal life, if not a god?) but he tempted her to grasp it for herself, and not wait upon God's good time.

This is so often the case with Satan's temptations, he offers to give us what God has already intended for us, but in the wrong way and at the wrong time.

Think about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

The "last temptation of Christ," was when  
**"the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."** ("Matthew 4:8)

Of course, God was already planning for Jesus to be Lord or Lords, and King of Kings.

But with this one little act of worship, Jesus could have avoided all that nasty business on Good Friday, but there was no way Jesus would try to rush his Father's will.

We need to beware of these same temptations.

I think of gambling, for example.

Whatever wealth God intends for us to steward over, he will deliver it into our hands, as He wills, how He wills, and when He wills; gambling is an effort to circumvent his plan.

One last thing we need to understand about demons and devils is they can and very much like to take possession of people (and apparently, pigs, make of that what you will.)

Possession is a terrible thing.

In a major possession, the devil's will completely overpowers the host's will and he can make the victim do whatever the devil wishes.

There are lesser forms of possession, known as demonic oppression, wherein the host's will is, to some greater or lesser extent, compromised by the devil.

So, we return to our earlier question, why did the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, choose to include demons in the Scriptures, and hence into our lectionary.

We can get an idea of the answer by considering stealth technology.

I remember the opening night of the war in Iraq, when you could see all the anti-aircraft fire going up, but no planes coming down.

It is virtually impossible to defend against something you cannot see; it is like going out blindfolded and shooting a shotgun randomly into the sky, you aren't going to bring down many birds.

In the same way, demons love dealing with victims who do not believe they exist.

If we fail to warn people about demons, they go out into the world unprepared.

As Peter warns us, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”** (12 Peter 5:8)

Great advice, but only if you know there are such a things as lions.

The great problem we have in the world today is many, indeed most people in the world do not believe in demons, so they cannot defend themselves.

To understand this, you must go back to the so-called “Enlightenment.”

The Enlightenment was based on a worldview known as “materialism.”

Materialism teaches there is nothing in the universe but matter and energy, space and time, thus nothing greater than nature, no demons, no angels, no God, no afterlife.

Of course, materialism appeals to human pride.

The materialist can quote that horrible poem, *Invictus*, which concludes with the last couplet, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”

Of course, the materialist is by no means captain of his soul, he is just an unwitting pawn controlled by demons.

Which brings us around to the question, why should we believe in demons?

There are many answers to that question.

If you want to explore the subject, I would suggest **“People of the Lie,”** by Scott Peck, or **“Hostage to the Devil: The Possession and Exorcism of Five Living Americans”** by Malachi Martin.”

There is, however, a much better reason.

Simply put, Jesus speaks of demons, and not in a way which indicates he is speaking metaphorically; if Jesus is who we say he is, he could not be wrong about such a thing.

But finally, I find I need to believe in demons for the simple reason if I did not believe in demons, I would long ago have given up all hope for mankind.

If men could be Nazis, or Stalinists, or Maoists, or followers of Putin or Kim Jung Il, or on a local scale, serial killers, pederasts, wife beaters, racists, or bullies, without outside assistance, if men were capable of such evil without supernatural assistance, then humanity is just too far gone to be redeemed.

But I don't believe that, if I did, I wouldn't have spent the last 35 years of my life doing what I have been doing.

Because I know, or perhaps better, to live I need to believe that Christ is still in the business of casting out demons.

I must believe when mankind turns to Christ, all those demonic forces will be cast out and mankind will become the sort of beings Christ died to allow us to be.

Our little piece of that Cosmic struggle is just to keep proclaiming the Gospel until all men come to Christ and are free.

*Amen.*

And now we ascribe, as is most justly due, unto Thee, O Lord, all might, majesty, power, and dominion, both now and forever. *Amen.*

**“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”** (St. Matt. xxv. 40.)”