

*In Nomine Jesu*

## Perceptions

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love this text. I appreciate Jesus' directness in responding to the people who were tempting Him. It's one of those great times when Jesus just takes His adversaries' words and makes them eat them. Sometimes we humans can come up with some interesting ideas. Most of the time, these ideas are based on our perception, experience and logic. Or to use our Latin Lenten name for this week, our Oculi, our eyes. Unfortunately, all of those very useful tools have been lessened by our ever-annoying and frustratingly sinful human nature. Thankfully, we have a Guy who doesn't have the old Adam living in Him. We have a Guy whose perception, experience and logic are as perfect as they were meant to be. As we go through our text for today, look at the differences between how Jesus thinks about things, and how we think about things. Our text begins,

*And He was casting out a demon of a mute man, and it happened when the demon went out the mute man spoke and the crowds marveled.<sup>1</sup>*

Our pericope, our section of Scripture for today, begins with the exorcism of a demon. This is a bit of a twist to what we normally hear. Generally speaking the climax of a pericope involving an exorcism is the exorcism itself, but not this time. This time we are hearing about the

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:14

discussion, really more of a lecture, which follows after the demon has been cast out.

In a slightly smaller twist, we also hear very little about the man who was being healed. All we know about him is that he was mute. (Matthew supplies that he was blind as well.) The reason that we don't hear much about him is because this section is much more focused on the crowds and their reactions to what just happened. This is not to say that we should underestimate the impact of what Jesus did for this man. But it is to say that as far as this section of the Word is concerned, he is serving as an object lesson.

We are going to hear three different responses to Jesus action. They show three different ways of looking and thinking about the various events that we experience in our life. More importantly though, they show three different ways of viewing, or in our case hearing, God's actions in our world.

The first response is marveling. Now you may remember, or maybe not, that over Christmas I spoke about how marveling at something, while not necessarily a bad reaction, is also not necessarily a good reaction. It is basically you viewing something and thinking to yourself, "Well you don't see that every day." You can marvel at good things as well as you can marvel at bad things. People marvel at the birth of a baby for instance. However, you can also marvel at horrible things. In English, we generally use the word horrified to express this type of marveling. In the Bible, when you hear this word, it generally carries the idea of being surprised at what you see.

You have likely marveled at one time or another about something that you heard from this pulpit or received from this table. And that is certainly not a bad reaction and can be very appropriate. It is astounding to think that when we drink this wine and eat this bread, we are in fact drinking the Blood of Christ and eating His body. However it is important to not confuse marveling with believing. They are two very different things. Enough about that though, let's move on to the other two reactions in our text.

*But certain ones from among them said, "By Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, He casts our demons." And others were tempting him seeking signs from Heaven from Him.<sup>2</sup>*

While marveling is a fairly neutral reaction, these next two are not quite so neutral. The first one is a reaction against what the crowds saw. They see this amazing and wonderful thing and they instantly seek to find a way to discredit it. They try to turn this event to their own purposes and try to use it against their enemy Jesus. We'll see how Jesus deals with this attack momentarily.

Somewhere in between marveling and attacking you have those who wanted to see more. You should be a tad more careful with this reaction because you aren't told what these people's motivation is. Generally speaking Jesus speaks against seeking more signs than what one was given. It is natural that when the Divine comes down and interrupts your normal everyday life you want more. Humans are drawn to the Divine like

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 11:15-16

moths to the flame. Unfortunately, frequently, the result is also very similar.

Your Lord has told you where you are able to find Him and what signs you ought to expect. You can find Him in the Word and the Sacraments. They also serve as your signs. Sometimes God blesses you by coming into your lives in other ways as well. When that happens though, and it certainly can and does happen, recognize that God has blessed you with that experience, but it is not for humans to go looking for more of that type of experience. For He has not promised that He will always give you those extra experiences, and Satan is not afraid to use your expectations of Divine intervention against you.

Now let's come back to that reaction against the miracle, because that's what Jesus spends most of His time talking about in this text. Our text continues:

*But He knew their thoughts, He said to them, "Every kingdom against itself divided is being ruined, and a house against the house falls. But if also the Satan against himself is divided, how will his kingdom be stood? For you all say that I by Beelzebul cast out demons."<sup>3</sup>*

Here's the part that I enjoy – probably a little too much. Jesus takes what the naysayers said and promptly turns it around and uses it against them. It's a great reversal and shows that one really shouldn't try to argue with Jesus. He's a lot better at it than we are.

But let's talk about our perceptions again. Because on some level what they said against Jesus may sort of ring true in our ears. On a human

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 11:17-18

level, we wouldn't put it past the devil, or other humans, to use these kind of tactics. Unfortunately, we see it quite frequently in our politics. We recognize that these are underhanded tactics, but we also, generally speaking, think that they work.

In our text for today however, Jesus reveals the truth for us. He reveals that what is going on between God and the devil is not some trivial argument where you use such popularity tactics. This is a war between kingdoms. And Kingdom warfare tactics state that you don't force your own people to withdraw from a stronghold against their will with such violent means. A Kingdom divided against itself is already being ruined.

On our level, this war between the Kingdom of the Heavens and the Kingdom of the Devil is often played out with words. Sometimes that leads us to not take it as seriously as, for instance, the war against ISIS. Yet the reality is that, from most western perspectives, the War against ISIS is a war for people's earthly lives. While this is an important and worthwhile thing to fight for, the War against the Kingdom of the Devil is a war for people's eternal lives.

Don't let the appearances deceive you. We are fighting a war against the most deadly foe that humanity ever has or ever will face. Just because we are using words rather than bullets does not negate this truth. Jesus isn't done using His Word yet either. He continues:

*But if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do the sons of you cast them out? For this, they must be judges of you all. And if by the finger of God I cast out demons, then coming upon you all is the Kingdom of God.*

Jesus again appropriates the words that His enemies tried to use against Him. He then proceeds to shove them even deeper down His enemies' throats. He brings their sons into the picture. Jesus wasn't the only person who was casting out demons after all. There were, in fact, other Jewish men who traveled around doing that very same thing.

(As a side note, Beelzebul literally translates into English as lord of the flies or lord of the dung heap. Which means that they just called the Father that, since the Father is the one by whom Jesus casts out demons. Of course, Jesus then turns that around and corrects their blasphemy.)

By bringing their sons into the picture Jesus is showing those listening how petty His enemies are. They say that Jesus is casting out demons by Beelzebul, but they wouldn't say that about their own sons. What's the difference? Well the answer is obvious. Jesus is their enemy and their sons aren't. So clearly, they reason, Jesus must be calling on Beelzebul to do His deeds while clearly their sons are doing it by the finger of God.

Look beyond what we normally do. Because we absolutely show this kind of favoritism and faulty logic on a regular basis. Just to give you an example, have you ever heard an older brother say that it's not O.K. for anyone else to beat up on his siblings except for himself? That's obviously faulty logic and we know that. Jesus shows here though, that we don't always think about that before we end up saying something that is clearly wrong.

Jesus also gives His enemies a warning and He does it using warfare language. He says, "If by the finger of God I cast out demons, then coming upon you is the Kingdom of God." He reveals to them why they are seen

by God as adamant in standing against Jesus. Because they know that if He truly is from God, then they are standing in front of an oncoming army. They know they would be tempting the Lord their God if Jesus truly is from God. They also knew just as well as what happens to people who stand against the coming of the Lord of Hosts.

Let's continue our march through this text:

*When a strong man has been armed to protect his own house, in peace are his possessions. But as soon as a stronger than him man comes in the night to him, the full armor of him in which he trusted is taken away, and the spoils of him distributed. The ones who are not with me are against me, and the ones not gathered with me are scattered.<sup>4</sup>*

Jesus gives us another illustration here. The illustration is of a strong man protecting his house. Now remember that this whole discussion was started by the casting out of a demon. So, when you hear this illustration, realize that the strong man is the devil or a demon, and that the demon's house and possessions are a human. Because that's what the goal of the devil is. He wants a whole bunch of little human slaves. And if he can't get that, then at the very least he's going to do his best to keep "his" humans away from God.

But Jesus is the Man who is stronger than the devil. And that is the other thing we must make sure we see. The devil tries to make it sound like this war between his kingdom and the Kingdom of God is a war between equals. This is simply not true!

Yet, whenever you hear about this war from just about anywhere other than Scripture or one proclaiming Scripture, this is how it is

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 11:21-23

portrayed. Movies, books, poems, speeches and plays almost always portray the war between Heaven and Hell as being a closely matched battle that will only be decided based on the actions of the humans involved. Let this be clear: the war between God and the Devil is a complete and utter massacre of the devil and his forces. These battles are still going on, but the fight is now in the clean-up stages.

When Jesus died on the cross with all the sin of humanity on His shoulders, He won the war. Now, He is going around sweeping things up. Now maybe you're wondering, why is He taking so long? Why doesn't He just finish it instead of drawing it out?

Well to answer that, hear this word that Jesus gives us. "The ones not gathered with me are scattered."<sup>5</sup> You see, Jesus is still trying to gather as many of the devil's human followers as possible. He's still trying to save them, because He knows that when the final days come, if they aren't with Him they will be scattered to the depths of Hell. That's not what He wants. So, He is patient and He will continue to proclaim His Word in an effort to save them.

This Lent as our texts move us closer and closer to the Cross, recognize that that is where the Man who is stronger than the devil saved you. When you look at the Stations of the Cross that are going up around our nave, use eyes that have been uplifted by the Word. See the reality that is being portrayed there. Hear the Word declaring your victory over Beelzebul and see the image of that victory played out.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 11:23b

Unfortunately, I have run out of time, and so I won't be able to cover the wanderings of the evil spirits and Jesus denial of the worship of Mary. But I will leave you with those words.

*Whenever the impure spirit is cast out from man, it travels through waterless places seeking relief, and when it finds nothing it says, "I will turn back into the house of me from which I was cast out." And coming it finds having been swept and made neat. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and comes into there to dwell, and it happens the last of that man is worse than the first.*

*And it happened in the speaking of Him this, raised up a certain voice of a woman from the crowds, she said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which nursed you."*

*And He said to her, "On the contrary blessed is the one who hears the Word of God and keeps it."*

**May the peace which passes all understanding, and which comes from the Word of God, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Lent III Oculi, 2015

March 8, 2015

Psalm 136:1-16; Jeremiah 26:1-15; Ephesians 5:1-9; Luke 11:14-28

Vicar Christopher M. Craig

*Soli Deo Gloria*