

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last week, we heard how the devil tried to tempt Jesus from pursuing His divinely appointed purpose. Jesus thwarted the devil's scheme then, but the devil wasn't done. Luke reported at the end of that text that "*when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time*" (Luke 4:13). That time had come in today's Gospel, though in a more subtle way. This week the devil worked through the Pharisees, using their forked-tongues to try to move Jesus off of His single-minded purpose.

For one gets the impression from the text that the Pharisees actually had Jesus' best interest at heart, after all, they warned Him about Herod. They warned Him about Herod's plan to kill Jesus. How frightening! Perhaps Jesus should flee the danger, as His guardian Joseph had done years before, taking the holy family to Egypt when Jesus was but a small child (Matt. 2:13-15).

Surely, back then, Herod the Great was seeking to destroy this acclaimed King of the Jews. The problem here is that there is no indication that this Herod, Herod Antipas, Herod the Great's son, wanted to put Jesus to death. The Bible tells us, rather, that Herod had heard of Jesus and wanted to see Him (Luke 9:9). Was He John the Baptist come back from the dead, or Elijah, or some other prophet of old, as some thought? Moreover, later, when Jesus was passed from Pilate to Herod at His inquisition before being sentenced to death, Luke reports that Herod "*was very glad*" to see Jesus, that "*he had long desired to see him,*" that he "*was hoping to see some sign done by him*" (Luke 23:5). Disappointed that Jesus didn't perform a few tricks for him, after mistreating Jesus, Herod had Him sent back to Pilate.

Truly this was a deception by the Pharisees, acting as agents of the devil, perhaps unwittingly, but agents nonetheless. Their deception was meant to turn Jesus' resolute countenance (Luke 9:51) into one filled with doubt and fear so that He might turn back from what He was sent to do.

But Jesus was no coward. He was not about to flee with His tail between His legs. The time had come for Him to fulfill what He came to do. From His incarnation and birth, Jesus had come from the Father's side to be our Savior. From infancy on the shadow of cross and death fell upon Jesus. Remember how Simeon told Jesus' mother: "*a sword will pierce through your own soul also*" (Luke 2:35). Jesus came to die, and His death would rend the soul of His mother.

Therefore, Jesus would continue His trek toward Jerusalem, casting out demons and healing the sick along the way. But He had to "*finish His course*" in Jerusalem — it could not be otherwise, for Jerusalem was the city where prophets were killed. Jesus, the prophet rejected in His hometown, was going to Jerusalem to die.

What kind of fear Jesus felt as the time drew ever nearer is unclear. But surely He did, for Jesus was truly our brother in the flesh, made like us “*in every respect*” (Heb. 2:17), Scripture says. When He went without food, He hungered, as we do. And when His death drew near, I submit, He feared, as we do. As Luther said: “Fear is something natural because death is a punishment, and therefore something sad” (*Luther’s Works*, 54:65).

Indeed, most likely the fear that Jesus felt was worse than any fear that we have experienced, for the punishment that He endured was not for any sin He committed. As one criminal, one of Jesus’ fellow condemned, said to the other: “*we indeed [are condemned] justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong*” (Luke 23:41). Truly, someone who is being justly punished can resign himself to his fate, knowing that he is receiving his “just deserts.”

But Jesus did not deserve this punishment; He chose it, and not for Himself, but for us. This sacrificial Lamb of God bore not His own sins to the cross but ours, that He might “*take[] away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus chose it, not because we deserved His mercy, but out of His great love for us, that is, for the world. Jesus chose it, even though there would be many who would reject His great act of courage, like some of the so-called “natural branches” did (Rom. 11:21): “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... [h]ow often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*”

We call such people heroes — they are those who act with courage, who run toward the danger and not away from it. It’s not that they’re not afraid; rather they conquer their fears in the face of danger, and they act.

I preached to our LSUS kids this week on this text using Marvel’s Avengers as an illustration. They are the Marvel universe’s superheroes. You may have read about some of them in comic books. Now they have an array of full-length movies featuring these superheroes. I showed the kids a picture where these heroes were displayed across it, some more prominent, some less.

The kids knew them; they were excited about them; they had their favorites. Why were they heroes, I asked? Because they took on the villains that threatened Earth or even the universe as we know it. They were the ones going toward the danger in order to save the cosmos, often even ready to sacrifice their own lives for those who could not save themselves.

But we don’t need fictional, comic book characters to think about courage and heroism. Anyone who overcomes his fears to act and does right is courageous. Soldiers will tell you: courage is not being fearless; it is mastering the fear to do

one's duty. They are surely real-life heroes. And they are not alone. Many of us are put in fearsome situations. God grant us to act with courage, indeed, in the model of Jesus, for surely, His courage was on display today. He was not going to let the villain Herod or the villainous Pharisees move Him from His duty. Surely, Jesus is the ultimate hero, better than any of us, stronger than any of us, more selfless than any of us, more righteous than any of us, and certainly better than any fictional superhero.

Yes, Jesus is our real-life hero. God grant that we might look to Him for aid in every need. God grant that we may remain faithful to Him, safe under the cover of His wings. And God grant that we may be strengthened by Him in these latter days by His holy Body and Blood, singing "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,*" until that day when He comes again in glory, when we will see Him with our own eyes, and we will raise up again the cry of the faithful: "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.