

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last week, we heard about Jesus' temptation by the devil in the wilderness. And Luke ends that account saying, "*And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.*" That time had come in our text, as Jesus was in Galilee teaching the people and healing them. But this time the devil uses a more subtle approach. This time the devil uses the Pharisees' deceit to try to silence this prophet.

Of course, at first glance, you might think from the text that the Pharisees actually had Jesus' best interest at heart, after all they warned Him about Herod; they told Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him. Wasn't that nice. The problem is that there is no indication that Herod wanted to put Jesus to death. The Bible does tell us that Herod had heard of Jesus and wanted to see Him. Some had told him that Jesus was perhaps John the Baptist come back from the dead. He "*was hoping to see some sign done by him.*" Indeed, Herod would have the opportunity to kill Jesus on that Friday when Jesus suffered for the sins of the world. He didn't do it. He questioned Jesus, mocked Him, and treated Him with contempt; but then Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Thus, the Pharisees lied; they became thereby tools of the devil, for all lies are begotten of their father, and Jesus instructs us that the devil is "*a liar and the father of lies.*" Moreover, these lies had a purpose; this deception was meant to get Jesus off message, off purpose. "*Jesus! Flee! Get out of here quickly! If Herod catches you, you're a dead man. Stop your preaching. Stop your miracles; otherwise, Herod will know how to locate you. And he'll be able to capture you and kill you.*"

But Jesus avoids their trap and tells them that He would not be outfoxed and distracted from His mission. Rather He says He would "*finish [His] course,*" on "*the third day,*" that is, according to God's time. And that would mean His death. And it would happen in Jerusalem, not Galilee. "*I must go on,*" He says. "*It is necessary*" for me to make my way to Jerusalem. But it will not happen on your schedule, O Pharisees. It will happen "*at the right time*" that the Christ will die "*for the ungodly.*"

In Jerusalem, Jesus would accomplish His mission, being killed, like the prophets before Him. There would Jesus accomplish all that He came to do for the world. There would He, the "*founder of [our] salvation*" be made "*perfect through suffering.*" There, would He, "*being made perfect,*" become "*the source of eternal salvation to all who listen to Him,*" who hear His voice and follow after Him. There, on the third day, would He reach His goal, not just pitiable death, but victorious resurrection and the salvation of the world. There, in Jerusalem, would

He do it of His own accord. He would lay down His life for His sheep. And He would take it back up again in victory.

Now, why did the Pharisees do this, you may be wondering? They didn't like His teaching. Jesus was no namby-pamby preacher scratching their itching ears, telling them what they wanted to hear. Rather He had warned the people of the Pharisees' leaven. He had used some pretty harsh language about them. They knew Jesus often referred to them and their legalistic teachings, like in the verses immediately preceding our text. There, Jesus had just finished teaching the people (including the Pharisees) that the gate of salvation is a narrow one. And that gate was not their law, not even the law of Moses. "*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight.*" These were teachers of the law; they didn't like hearing that their law could not save. And to be sure, we preach the law still today, but we preach it that you may know your sin and be led to the narrow door. "*I am the door,*" Jesus says. "*Whoever enters by me will be saved.*" And unless you enter by the narrow door, you cannot enter in. Jesus says, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"

On the other hand, when the door closes, although many will stand outside and knock to enter, Jesus will say to them, "*I do not know where you come from.*" These are perhaps some of the saddest words of Scripture—Jesus who does not desire it, Jesus who went to the cross for the salvation of the whole world, Jesus who is the way to heaven will have to say to those who reject Him, "*I do not know [you]. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!*"

Depart from me, you who reject the grace of the Son of God, Jesus, the Messiah. Depart from me you who want to rely on your physical descent from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, even though they didn't rely on themselves: they believed God and their faith was credited to them as righteousness. Depart from me you who depend on your own keeping of the law of Moses, even though even you Jews know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in the Messiah here standing before you. Depart from me you who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to you, you who in your unbelief will also kill the Son sent to you by God. Depart from me you who despite all the efforts of God to gather you together under his wings, reject Him and His gracious gifts. "*Behold, your house is forsaken.*"

Jesus' words apply to us today. He will have to say the same thing to modern day Pharisees who want to rely on the faith of their Christian parents, but really don't care a thing about Him or His word or His sacraments. Depart from me you modern day Pharisees who, apart from faith, think that your trying your best to do the right thing is all that it takes before God. Depart from me you modern day

Pharisees who have your minds set on earthly things, who live shamefully, whose god is your belly. Depart from me you modern day Pharisees who “*walk as enemies of the cross,*” who fail to admit the seriousness of your sins, who refuse to repent of those sins, and so, “*are crucifying once again the Son of God to [your] own harm and holding him up to contempt.*” “*Behold, your house is forsaken.*”

Sad words, terrifying words, to those who are perishing. But in the midst of these words, Jesus also expresses words of such longing and with such picturesque language, this time not of a shepherd and sheep—this time of a bird and her chicks. “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...*”

This picture of the Lord is found also in the Psalms where the Lord, who is described as our “[r]efuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble,” and as “*the stronghold of our life,*” is also described as a bird that “*covers you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge,*” whose “*faithfulness is a shield and buckler.*” For the devil is for us the chicken hawk, seeking to sink his talons into the chick that strays away from the Hen. But the steadfast love of God for us is shown when He extends His wings and pulls us in, when we take refuge in the shadow of His wings. We are kept as the apple of His eye when we remain hidden in the shadow of His wings.

The devil is after us now. He couldn't defeat Jesus with an open assault, nor by the Pharisees' subtle deception, nor by cross and death. But we're easier prey. We often stray away from our Mother, the church, and from her Lord. Repent! And God grant that we may ever hear the call to repentance and “*return to the Lord our God.*” God grant us to know that through pastors and teachers and parents and Christian friends in our lives, Jesus, who reached His goal of earning our salvation by cross and resurrection, is working in our lives to give us the fruit of His passion, to make willing people out of unwilling, to gather us under His wings, to keep us safe by word and sacrament, to give us the joy of our salvation in the forgiveness of our sins.

Indeed, in this knowledge, we come to His Holy Sacrament today in faith, and go forth in joy, walking in the example of the apostles and prophets and all the saints who have gone before us in faith. And we must go on today and tomorrow and the next day in the protection of His wings until we have finished our course in faith and rest from our labors, until we are called to our heavenly abode, awaiting the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the glories of everlasting life. God grant us this faithfulness.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.