

*In the name of ✠ Jesus.*

I admit it. I've never had a face-to-face encounter with a demon-possessed person, and I'm glad about that. I have to tell you: the prospect frightens me.

Some of what I imagine such an encounter to be like comes from the 1973 movie *The Exorcist*. To this day, I don't like the Tubular Bells theme song, although it was quite popular in 1974.

That was my last semester of high school, but I didn't go see the movie that spring. I did see it later in the fall. I did it after a high school classmate went to see the movie and was so scared by it that he wouldn't sleep alone in his bedroom for some time. He slept in the bedroom of his younger sister.

I went to see it without the support of family around me. I was a young seventeen-year-old all alone, so to speak, in the Air Force, naïve and overly confident in my own courage. That movie was frightening, and not just in the “boo” sense of the word. I didn't have the extreme reaction that my classmate had, but it did affect me, and many of those images remain in my head. I have no desire to have an open battle with Satan or any of his hordes.

And for good reason. Satan is a powerful being, and his demons are, too. St. Paul calls them “*the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*” St. Peter says, “*Our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” The devil is the archenemy of mankind; he is the deceiver in the garden, and the Father of lies; he is a murderer, indeed, the cause of sin and therefore of death, not just to Adam and Eve, but to all mankind. With good reason does St. Peter tell us to “*be sober-minded*” when it comes to this enemy, and “*be watchful,*” and “*resist him.*”

The devil is our adversary, and he has a powerful army, a Legion and more, of demons at his side wielding wiles untold, using deceitful schemes against us, throwing flaming darts toward us. They assail our weak flesh. They use our self-indulgences, our covetousness, our bellies, our lusts to tempt us. This enemy pursues us—although for most of us, it's not so openly as to mean demon-possession, but he still pursues us—and far too often we succumb to the wiles of these schemers. We fall prey to the flaming darts of these spiritual forces of evil.

Now, in our text, Jesus did encounter a man who had demons. Although many today have skepticism about demon-possession, our text is clear. The man had demons. Moreover, he exhibited some of the very symptoms associated with demon-possession: Luke says he had extraordinary strength and could break the chains put on him; Matthew tells us that he would attack people who passed by; Mark tells us he cut himself with stones; and they all report that he knew things that he should not know. Luke reports that he not only called Jesus by name, but he

also called Him the “*Son of the Most High God*”—and this demoniac was a Gentile.

Jesus encounters this truly dangerous man, and yet He shows no fear. The man comes out to Jesus, perhaps at first to do to Jesus what he had done to many passers-by. But when he gets to Jesus, he doesn't attack Him. He falls down before Him in a foreshadowing of St. Paul's saying: that “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*” So it will be for many today who, deceived by Satan's wiles, reject Jesus' lordship. They will one day still bow the knee, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Son of the most High God, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus does not fear this man or the demons that inhabit his body, for Jesus is God's intervention in a world ruled by this world's prince. In the fullness of time, the Father sent forth His own Son as the offspring of Jacob and Judah, not to destroy a world afflicted with sin, but to be a blessing to it. At just the right time, God sent forth the offspring of woman, as promised in the garden, to intervene, to crush the ancient serpent's head. In Christ Jesus, God intervened in the possessed man's life. He cast out the demons, sent them off into a herd of pigs—and there were many, a Legion in this man. Jesus wasn't frightened because Jesus has the power over these enemies, and He demonstrated it here powerfully.

But a much greater intervention was yet to come—indeed the redemption of the whole world by this Son of Mary. By His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death, He would purchase and win us from the consequences of sin, from death and from the power of the devil.

That doesn't mean that the devil is not still strong. He is, as Luther penned: “*Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight. On earth is not his equal.*” The devil is still a powerful adversary. He is dangerous. But Christ has defeated Him. By His cross and resurrection, Christ entered into the strong man's house and showed Himself to be the Stronger man. Having bound the strong man in defeat, He has set you free from the guilt and condemnation of your sins.

It's done ... accomplished. “*It is finished!*” Which reminds me of a question I was asked the other day in catechism class. “*What's the difference among all the religions?*” And it does seem that there are so many religions these days. Back when I was in catechism, we weren't really concerned with them. Then it was mostly distinguishing between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Now we need to know about so many more.

But in truth, there are only really two religions in the world: there's the religion of “do” and the religion of “done.” The religions of “do” seek to gain access to God by their own striving. The religion of “done” says it has all been done for you already. When it comes to the devil, that's good, for he's too

powerful for our weak flesh. But it's done, also, with regard to the devil: "*He's judged; the deed is done.*" Done in the fullness of time; done by the offspring, born of woman; done by the Word, incarnate by the Holy Spirit; done by the Son lifted up on the tree of the cross; done by bruising His heel and crushing the serpent's head; done by redeeming us from the law. Done.

Therefore, "*though devils all the world should fill all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill. They shall not overpower us.*" They've been defeated, and Jesus is by our side. Consider what happened to the demoniac: Jesus cast the demons from the man, and then the man was again in his right mind. He was clothed and sat at Jesus' feet. And later, he proclaimed Jesus throughout the city.

Consider what Jesus has done for you. Certainly He has defeated your enemies by His cross and resurrection, and then He joined you to that victory by your own baptism. In Holy Baptism, Jesus cast out the unclean spirit in you and prepared the way for the Holy Spirit to come and make His home in you. In baptism, you were recreated and made new: sins washed away; made holy, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. And you were clothed—clothed with Christ, clothed with the spotless garment He gives you, a robe washed and made white in the blood of a lamb. "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*"

Now you are privileged to sit at Jesus' feet, and learn from Him. And from there to go out and "*declare how much God has done for you,*" "*how much Jesus has done for you.*" And why would anyone listen to you? For the same reason they listened to this man: he had been changed.

Baptized into Christ, you too have been changed. You have died to sin, and been raised to walk in newness of life. St. Paul says, "*be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*" Again, St. Paul says, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" Therefore, St. Paul says, "*we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*"

That's just another way of saying to you, "*go and declare how much God, how much Jesus, has done for you.*" What do you say? Speak the truth in love. Tell of the yoke of sin, but tell of the freedom of the Gospel. Tell of Jesus, of cross, of the defeat of the devil, of resurrection, redemption, new life, baptism, forgiveness, reconciliation, hope, eternal life.

There you have it. Fear not, but rejoice. Although you have fierce foes in the spiritual powers of darkness, you have victory in Jesus, your light and salvation. Trust in Christ; rejoice in your baptism; be strengthened by His supper; go and tell.

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