

Prayer of the Church 3rd Sunday in Lent *Oculi = My Eyes* March 8th 2026

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. [Possible brief silence]

Everlasting God, have mercy upon Your Baptized children. Guard us from the evil one, deliver us from temptation and keep us, by Your Holy Spirit, in communion with the stronger man, Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, that we might live in His grace and walk in His ways to the glory of Your holy name. *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Gracious God, we give You thanks for the innumerable blessings You bestow upon us, without any merit or worthiness on our part. We are especially thankful for the pastors You send into our midst to preach Your Word and administer Your Sacraments to us. Keep them faithful to their charge, and enliven us by Your grace to hear the Word of God and keep it. *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Almighty God, remember those who have been entrusted with civil authority among us and those who serve in our armed forces. Protect, strengthen and uphold them in every good deed. *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For the unemployed, that they might find gainful employment to provide for their families and for their own physical needs; and for all the poor and needy, that they be given grace to trust God's promised provision of daily bread for His children, *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For the wealthy, that they be protected from the temptations of greed and that they would, in faith toward God and love for their neighbor, share from their abundance with their neighbor in need, *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

For the sick, that the Great Physician of body and soul would, according to His Will, grant healing to their bodies [*especially F.O.S.L Prayer List*] ... and all those we each name in our hearts in personal prayer. We pray they be sustained in confidence in God's loving care for them in all situations, *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember this day Your gift of Holy Baptism, where You washed us clean and poured on us Your Holy Spirit. Through Your Holy Word and blessed Sacraments, He constantly reminds us of Your cleansing forgiveness and gracious promises. *LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.*

Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

OCULI = LENT-3: Luke 11:14–28 SPIRITS, DEMONS & JESUS 3.8.26 F.O.S.L

GREETING

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the Stronger Man,

LOTTA DEVILS & DEMONS There's a lot of talk about **the devil** and **demons** in Lent, isn't there? First we had [**Lent-1**] the temptation of Jesus **by Satan** in the wilderness. Then last week [**Lent-2**] there was the **demon-possessed** daughter of the Canaanite woman. And today [**Lent-3**] Jesus casts out a **demon that made a man mute**. We must admit that all of this makes us a little **uncomfortable**. When demons get mentioned, we tend to slide over the matter as if it doesn't mean anything to us or embarrasses us. After all, Who **still believes in devils in this scientific age?** How many intelligent and educated people take Satan seriously? We modern people assume that it's just a lot **ancient superstition**. No, today the devil is almost something of a **joke**. In fact, the word "devil" has gone all the way from dread to endearment, as when a grandmother says of her grandson, *"Isn't he just a little devil?"*

2! DEVIL/ISH MISTAKES **C.S. Lewis** once observed that when it comes to the Devil, there are **TWO MISTAKES** we can make. One is **thinking too much of him**, and the other is **not thinking enough about him**. Some people conceive of the devil almost as being equal with God, when in fact he is merely a fallen angel, very powerful and utterly evil to be sure, but a creature nonetheless. People become terribly frightened of the devil and forget that his rebellion has been crushed under the heel of Jesus, who died and rose again in victory over him. However, others don't give the devil any thought at all. They think of Satan as the stuff of fairy tales, at best a figure who is only symbolic of evil, but not a literal being. They forget that the **devil's goal now is to lure people away from the safe refuge of Christ Jesus**; and if Satan can do that by making people think of him as nothing real, just some sort of Halloween caricature, all the better.

3RD! DEVIL/ISH MISTAKE But I would add that there's a **third mistake** we can make which, in a way, combines these first two mistakes. And it's something even many Christians do. We know as believers that there's more going on than what the eye can see, that there is a spiritual realm beyond the simple grasp of our five senses. But too often, **instead of listening to God's Word on this subject, we embrace all sorts of superstitious beliefs** that also have the effect of doing the devil's work. And in particular our pop culture's fascination and belief in ghosts and spirits.

BIBLE: Here is **what Scripture says**: It is written in **Ecclesiastes 12** that when someone dies, their spirit returns to God - plain and simple. **Hebrews 10** speaks of how it is given to man to die once and then the judgment of Heaven or hell - certainly no reincarnation or inhabiting of other bodies or anything like that. To the thief on the Cross, Jesus said **"Today you will be with me in Paradise."** And on and on it goes. **Never in the Bible is there a period of time** where the spirits of the dead are doing unfinished business on this earth before they can enter into the light or some other such nonsense. Don't let Hollywood movie fictions or TV shows about the supernatural and communicating with the dead and ghost hunting and prankster ghosts and good or evil spirits of the departed - don't let such things lure you into foolishness. **It's just not true.**

BY *BEELZEBUB*

Again, it is the **goal of the devil and his demons to lure you away** from the safe refuge of Christ to something else, anything else, and to keep your attention there away from the Savior. And if Jesus is center stage, then they'll try to **pervert and distort who He is and what He has said. That's what happens in today's Gospel reading.** Jesus casts out a demon, and what do the unbelievers say?[] That somehow He did this good by using an evil power, the **power of Beelzebub** = another word for Satan. This is the way of the wicked: to call good evil and to call evil good—we see that all the time in our culture. The devil is a liar, and he'll do whatever he can to try to shout over the truth of Jesus and to keep you from trusting in Him. Our Lord does not cast out demons by Beelzebub. **He is the Stronger Man who overcomes the satanic strong man** with nothing but a finger, the finger of God, which is the power of His Holy Spirit.

BE CAREFUL

Jesus is **warning us here to be vigilant about our ancient enemy.** Because once an unclean spirit (a demon) is cast out, if he gets the opportunity to return, he will do so - and it will be even worse the next time. This is why the Church in our Baptismal Rite of a child **asks the parents** if they are committed to teaching the child **the Catechism, the Word of God**, and will they make sure the child is brought to God's House. You see, Baptism is really **a form of exorcism.** Luther's ancient Baptismal Rite begins this way: ***"Depart unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit."*** It is not enough to Baptize a child, only to have his or her tender faith starved by parents who **deprive their son or daughter of God's Word.** In such a case, it is better not to put a "target on the child's back" in the first place. Christians are to be continually on guard against the evil one by **being devoted to the Word of God and prayer.**

DEVIL IS SUBTLE

A good deal of Jesus' ministry involved battling unclean spirits - and His Body, the Church, continues to wage the battle against lying, satanic spirits. Now demon-possession may indeed be extremely rare. Typically, the devil and the fallen angels **are more subtle**, tempting us behind the scenes, working through our sinful flesh to drive a wedge between us and God, **chipping away at the stone**, gradually eating away at us until we are alienated from God and **don't even realize it or care.** Remember that the **devil's ultimate goal is to take away your faith in Christ.** And that's best accomplished not by an obvious frontal assault but by deceptively trying to undermine what you believe, by planting doubt, by turning your attention to other spiritualities that appear holy but are devoid of the Gospel of Christ the crucified.

[HOW-TO] BATTLE SATAN

So, **How do we fight an enemy we can't see?** How do we guard ourselves against such a crafty enemy who is more powerful than we are? The answer is really very simple: **Take refuge in Christ.** Because He is the Stronger Man who overcomes the strong man (the Devil). He is the One who not only won the victory for us in the wilderness, the **"Son of David"** Who slung the smooth stone of the Word and felled (the evil Goliath) Satan. He is our Champion, the One Who utterly destroyed Him through the Cross. **He turned the devil's own weapons against him.** Jesus overcomes the crafty one with His own divine and holy craftiness, sneaking into the devil's

kingdom of death, allowing Himself to be crucified, and then from the inside killing the devil's power, **rising from the dead in glory on the Third Day.**

HE'S [ALREADY] JUDGED

Satan IS defeated and undone and humiliated. Christ the **Conqueror** has rescued us from the realm of darkness and brought us into His own Kingdom of mercy and love and goodness. Our Lord has cast out our unclean spirits at the Baptismal font and made our bodies the temple of His Holy Spirit. He has spoken His powerful, forgiving words into our ears. He feeds us with His holy, life-giving Flesh and Blood to sanctify us and fortify and strengthen our spirits. **We come to this church week by week because we need it all the time, to be strengthened against the crafts and assaults of the devil and to be equipped to resist them.**

DARK-2-LIGHT

There is **only One Way to be safe from evil = to be with Jesus**, our Fortress and our Refuge. Jesus says, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."* We gather with Jesus **right here.** Today's **Epistle** reading [**Ephesians 5:8**] put it this way: *"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord."* Your days of being imprisoned to Satan **are over.** You have been released from your shackles and led **out of the dark prison into the glorious light of Christ!**

BLESSING/S 4 ALL

And this blessing from **God is for all who hear and believe and hold on to His Word.** Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."* Holding on to Christ's Words, **you are blessed and you are safe.** So if you are concerned or fearful about strange or unexplained experiences in your life, remember that all things are sanctified and made holy by the Word of God and prayer. At the Name of Jesus, the demons must flee. Call upon His Name, **not only here in this place, but also in your homes. Read the Word and pray out loud** so that both the angels and the demons can hear. God's Word cleanses and blesses and makes holy.

THE GREATER-1

It is written that, *"God has not given us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power and love and self-control..."* [**2 Timothy 1:7**]. So **cling to the Word of God** spoken and given to you in your Baptism. Let the words of God continually be in your ears and on your tongue. And be filled by the Holy Spirit with the Body and Blood of Christ, given and shed for the forgiveness of all your sins. The Scriptures say, *"Greater is He who is in you [Jesus], than [the evil one] who is in the world."* [**1 John 4:4**].

BE WITH LOVED ONES

And if you want to be close to departed loved ones, don't try to do that in superstitious ways. **Instead, meet them (here) at the Altar.** You know if they died in the faith, **they are with Christ, and Christ is here.** Here is where the Communion of Saints is. Let the highest love of your heart always be fixed on Jesus. Through Him, **nothing can snatch you from the Hand of God.** Remember that "on that Hand of God are the fingers" that cast out demons and that point you to the Cross where your Salvation was won. You have been liberated from all your sins by the Lord Jesus Christ. You are now free to walk in love as children of light. Let your eyes ever be on Christ, Who plucks your feet out of the net, Who conquers your enemy, **and Who WILL deliver you from all evil in the Resurrection of the body to Heaven! IJ'N, Amen. SDG**