

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Trinity III
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rmcneely+

be vigilant, be sober
because your adversary the devil
as a roaring lion
walketh about
seeking whom he may devour

St Peter's words from today's epistle.

Written from his captivity in Rome

Not long before he was killed,
brutally crucified, head downward
at the hands of Nero, the Roman emperor.

Peter knew something of evil. And in his last days warned us of
the devil and his works.

The Apostles all knew evil in the days of Christ's earthly life.

They could see it for what it was.

They wrote of Jesus casting out the demons that vexed people.

It was a small,

but dangerous part of life,
especially in the days before Jesus' crucifixion.

In our time the devil and his works is a touchy subject.

But let's boldly go where few tread today.

Have we become blinded to the devil or perhaps by the devil?

In our time,

if we were to say too much about the evils of our day,
or the acts of the devil,
eyebrows raise
and the men in white coats are summoned
to take us to confinement for treatment.

It is interesting to consider how the devil has been perceived over the centuries.

There have been times and cultures
 in which the learned
 openly spoke of the devil working among them
 and were admired for their intellect.

The days of Shakespeare
 and the days of the Victorians for example.

But in our time, the self appointed effete intellectuals allow such talk only to the ignorant,
 the primitive tribes of Africa
 or the jungles of New Guinea.

They are not yet ‘enlightened’
 and can’t be expected to know any better.

But they conclude that our culture and society have risen above such things
 and speaking of it betrays ignorance.

Whether it is as then or now, it can serve satan’s purpose either way.

 If the people recognize the evil and spend their days in terror,
 spend a disproportionate amount
 of every waking moment in fear of him;

Or if, as in our time, we ignore him for fear of being ostracized in our society

Does not the devil win either way;

 In the one case of pre-occupation, people are not following the will of God,
 they are running in fear of the devil,

And in the other case,
 the devil works freely,
 unseen
 and unopposed; to unseat God in our lives.

Is there evil in our lives today?
Does the devil walk among us seeking whom he will devour?

I cannot answer that question for you. But I can speak for myself.

I have seen evil in the eyes of men such as Charles Manson
We know of evil at work in our recent history:

Hitler

Stalin

Pol Pot in Cambodia

I have seen them on the street as I walk in collar. There is a penetrating look in their eyes that marks them. Would the medical scientists of today call me paranoid? Perhaps.

But I think Peter was right. They are among us. And we must be vigilant, sober and prepared.

The mark of the devil is utter destruction, for destruction's sake.
Destruction without any other purpose.
Destruction which is followed by

. . . . nothing,
a void, by nothingness.

The devil, you see cannot create anything.
God is the creator.
Satan can only destroy.

I occasionally saw evil in my law practice,
in the litigation,
to which I dedicated by professional life.

Cases in which there can be no winners
No benefit to anyone

Cases that leave behind only ashes.
Typically brought and maintained for no purpose
but to destroy all the parties
and everyone who touches the case.

The plaintiff loses and receives nothing
The defendants receive judgment in their favor,
but are ruined by the cost
in money,
effort and emotional trauma.

The law firms that fold
when their contingent fee revenue is not there to pay salaries.

The families of the firm's people
that are destroyed by the layoffs
and their inability to pay their bills.

Even the court system that must host the trials
and consume precious public resources
and can only rule and watch the destruction.
Even the courts are diminished.

In criminal law there are those criminals that are different from the
rest. Most crime is driven by a purpose,
to make money,
to attain revenge,
or to achieve some end.

But every now and then there are those criminals that commit the
most heinous crimes, for which there is no purpose.

Senseless acts of depravity whose end
is only to destroy
and to move on to the next victim.
The Charlie Mansons of our time.

Can there be any considered doubt that the devil
either personified
or working through his captives
lurks among us?

Is not Peter right?

Does not the devil seek whom he will devour?

And when he strikes the consequences can be life shattering.

He uses his sacraments:

drugs
and alcohol
to destroy lives.

He infects people with the disease of hatred.

Before too long, a life is lost to him.

Completely devoured by his evil.

So what is the response of Christianity, what is the response of the church to shield us from the evil?

Peter, on the eve of his death at the hand of evil, gives advice;

First he says

Be vigilant

Be sober

Recognize the evil,

don't turn from it

or pretend it does not exist.

See it for what it is.

Understand how the devil works in our lives.

The best insight on this is by CS Lewis in the *Screwtape Letters*.

One of his fictional works, masterfully crafted as usual.

The book consists only of an exchange of letters

written by an apprentice devil to his boss

and the responses of the boss.

Through the reports of the apprentice and the advice given by the lieutenant devil, Lewis lays out the techniques and goals of the evil one in our lives.

He does not need a large and cataclysmic event in order to succeed.

The goal simply stated: is to get us off the page with God.

Anything to separate us from Him.

By diversion and lies,
By roadblock and by confusion
By subtlety

The devil needs only to turn us inward upon ourselves. And we will do his dirty work for him.

The devil easily gets us away from the devotion to our God,
and he has won.
We are easy victims

Consider this;

You notice that during the church service, your mind wanders from the liturgy more than usual

Or you find that where you once said daily prayers or perhaps said the daily offices; you don't any more.

You used to enjoy reading scripture or spending time with God

Is it just getting old; or are you being influenced away from your Lord?

Conflicts erupt in your closest relationships. You are feeling isolated from the people you love; family and friends.

You can't sleep, wake up with disturbing images.
You have an unexplainable fear or dread of a person, situation, place or thing.

You may have a series of financial crises,
conflicts in employment
that build and increase without reason.
You have an unusual series of illnesses that are inexplicable.

Persistent negative thoughts play on your mind

behind every conversation,
 suggesting that you are worthless,
 stupid, disliked, or unappreciated.

Now notice that none of these things are abnormal or uncommon.
 We all suffer things like this from time to time.
 The devil counts on us to ignore his subtlety.

When we encounter the bumps in life like this
 we need to retain perspective
 and question whether it is the knocks in life
 or whether they are the work of the devil
 or those through whom he works,
 It is helpful to know that we have an enemy.
 And that we may not be the cause of our own problems.

As Peter advises, we must be vigilant.
 Thoughtful
 Understanding the reality of what is going on; be forewarned.

Peter's second piece of advice:
 Remember the promise
 That the ultimate end of evil is assured.
 When the devil reminds us of our past.
 Remind him of his future;
 a lake of fire is reserved for the fallen angels.

His most important advice is;
 Remember that Jesus is enough.
 His victory on the cross;
 our redemption, greatly diminished the evil one
 Hirelings run away at the coming of the wolf
 But the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep.

St Paul spoke of the whole armour of God. Put it on every day;

Sandals: Bind on the sure footing of the Gospel of Jesus
 Christ
 The belt; the truth of God
 The breastplate of righteousness
 The helmet of salvation
 The shield of faith and
 The sword; the word of God.

Today's Gospel relates two parables in which Jesus is reminding us
 that God is searching for us to save us

To protect us.

In the first parable,

he is seeking us to protect us from the same predator,
 the ramping lion that Peter refers to in the Epistle,
 who is hunting to devour our soles.

St Paul told us in one of the Archbishop Provence's favorite Bible
 verses;

Neither death
 Nor life,
 Nor angels
 Nor principalities
 Nor powers
 Nor things present
 Nor things to come
 Nor height
 Nor depth
 Nor any other created thing

Shall be able to separate us from the love of God

Which is in Christ Jesus our lord. (Romans 8:38)

Jesus is enough and our refuge in times of trouble.

Peter's last advice from today's epistle is this:

Resist the devil and the evil,
Be Steadfast in faith
Knowing that the same sufferings
are experienced by your brotherhood in the world

But may the God of all grace,
Who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus
After you have suffered a while
Perfect
Establish
Strengthen
And settle you.
To him be the glory
And the dominion
Forever and ever
Amen