

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Third Sunday in Lent  
 March 23, 2025  
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We beseech thee. . .  
 Stretch forth the right, hand of thy Majesty  
 To be our defense against all our enemies:

We are almost at the midpoint in our Lenten discipline;  
 halfway to Easter.  
 From here the Church points us toward the Resurrection; our goal,  
 With Laetare Sunday,  
 Passiontide  
 and Palm Sunday in the following three weeks.

But today, the Collect, the Epistle and the Gospel point us toward  
 The enemy.  
 In Paul's day and in Luke's day the enemy was physical and  
 spiritual and very real.  
 Both outside and inside.  
 Both visible and invisible.

While Christians are being confronted by violence from without  
 In various places around the globe today;  
 We are blessed to rarely face that kind of violence here in SF.  
 However, we face enemies from the forces of secularization  
 trying to confine us to these walls.  
 And we face enemies that are invisible  
 And insidious within ourselves.

The spiritual enemy within and the enemy outside,  
 That is the enemy that we confront during Lent  
 And it is that enemy that is the focus for us this morning.

In two short parables, the Gospel for this week offers Jesus' advice  
 When dealing with the enemy.

In the first He describes a man who believed that his palace  
 Was the source of his protection.  
 His confidence was in the walls of his own making.  
 Jesus declares that He is stronger than the walls made of hands  
 And that our faith  
 Our confidence must be with God.

In the second parable, Jesus describes what happens  
 When we remove a demon.  
 Or, perhaps in our case when we remove a sin from our lives.  
 If we do nothing, we are worse off than before.  
 The enemy will return in force,  
 Unless we fill the void left by our sins  
 With righteous behavior.

The discussion evokes the oft misunderstood Church doctrine  
 Of the “Church Militant”.  
 And ancient doctrine that at one time  
 faced the threat of physical violence.  
 And was met with force.  
 Over the Centuries, it has become a spiritual warfare against evil  
 Sin and sometimes even ourselves.

Archbishop Provence always said:  
 “If you want to know what we believe, listen to us pray.

So listen to what the Baptism Service says  
 about the Church Militant:  
 After the person to be baptized has had  
 water poured over them three times  
 The Priest signs them with blessed oil  
 In the form of a cross upon the forehead,  
 While saying this prayer:

“That hereafter he/she shall not be ashamed  
 To confess the faith of Christ crucified  
 And manfully to fight under His banner,  
 Against sin, the world and the devil;  
 And to continue Christ’s faithful soldier  
 And servant until his life’s end.”

Quite a statement of the Church militant;  
 At the very beginning of Christian Life.  
 Our dedication to fight the enemy under Christ’s banner  
 All the days of our lives.

The enemies of God and of His Earthly Kingdom take many forms.  
 Certainly Satan himself, a fallen angel, a spiritual being.  
 They may also be in human form,  
 Those who do his will, knowingly or unknowingly.  
 Unfortunately we ourselves  
 occasionally fall in this category  
 without knowing and without understanding.

The enemies of God may be in the form of evil  
 Evil behavior. Evil intent.  
 Hatred.  
 It may be fear and its usual product; anger.  
 We know them by their fruits.  
 The product of their works.

In this week’s Epistle, St Paul points us toward the works  
 Of our enemy.  
 Sometimes it is the work of others.  
 But sometimes internal in ourselves.

Paul points us toward the acts, the means, temptations  
 And distractions by which the Devil accomplishes his evil.

In Paul’s day there were two predominant problems that pervaded  
 society;  
 Lascivious behavior and idolatry.

Paul lists them as

Fornication, uncleanness and filthiness  
 in the nature of lasciviousness  
 and covetousness, foolish and unfit talk and jesting  
 in the nature of idolatry.

It seems not much has changed since then and we face much the same problems today.

Paul offers a stern warning:

“No unclean person nor covetous man who is an idolater  
 Hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.  
 Be not ye therefor partakers of them.”

Paul also offers the antidote:

“For ye were sometimes darkness:  
 but now are ye light in the Lord.  
 Walk as children of light.  
 Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness  
 But rather, reprove (or as we would say today, expose) them  
 All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light.  
 For whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

By this and other Epistles, Paul suggests that light is the key to survival.

It is no coincidence that Paul’s discussion comes to us at the Celestial moment in which our daylight is increasing  
 And the sun’s path is climbing ever higher in our sky.

Paul uses ‘light’ as a powerful metaphor here and in other Epistles.

“Light” has a number of meanings:

It can mean knowledge in the general sense.  
 Light can mean Holy Scripture  
 -the truth of the inspired word of God.  
 Light can mean truth itself. Life itself.

Jesus once said “I am the light of the world”  
 So light can be a reference to Him.  
 It is also a metaphor pointing to God,  
 Or a symbol of Hope and Goodness.  
 Or it may signify a life following God’s guidance  
 His will in our lives.

John’s Gospel contains this, in reference to Jesus:

“In Him was life and the life was the light of men.  
 And the light shineth in the darkness  
 And the darkness comprehended it not.  
 There was a man sent from God whose name was John  
 The same came for a witness,  
 to bear witness of the light  
 That all men through him might believe.  
 He was not that light but was sent to bear witness of that Light.  
 That was the true Light  
 which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Sometimes our sins are hidden from us. Hard to recognize.  
 Lurking in the shadows of our souls.  
 To avoid discovery  
 Even by ourselves.

The light of knowledge and truth is the sword that illuminates the  
 darkness

Exposing that pesky sin  
 So that we can deal with it  
 Cut it out  
 Lay it before us  
 Examine it, Analyze it  
 Confess it  
 Be absolved of it.  
 Remove it from our lives.

The light shines forth and illuminates that pathway  
That narrow road to God  
That way fraught with danger, deception and difficulty.  
The light is our beacon guiding us through  
Exposing the enemy and  
showing us the righteous way to God.

The light of Jesus is the Hope that brings us forth.  
Gives us the strength to pursue the enemy within us.

So, you see,  
Even as each day in Lent has more light than the day before  
“Light” in all its metaphoric meanings  
is the ever strengthening sword we wield  
to ferret out our enemy, our sins  
to protect us from the enemy that is without  
and to discover and remove the enemy within  
and with which we manfully fight under his banner  
against sin, the world and the devil  
as Christ’s faithful soldier until our life’s end.

