

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light; (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth;) ...all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

We are on a journey, a journey in the love and wisdom of God, and toward the love and wisdom of God. [remember blind man at beginning of Lent, the journey is a journey towards light, toward a new capacity to see. We go up to Jerusalem, where all things which were written shall come to pass, see with new eyes. We go up to the passion of our Lord, to his death, and we go up to his resurrection, trampling down death by death, we go up to the new beginning, to the light of the eternal day, the 8th day. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead. This awakening is described in different ways this morning – we are invited to walk in love, and to hear the word of God and keep it, to walk as children of light.

This is the positive part of the message, what we are to seek. But we are also warned: For the third week in a row, we struggle with devils, devils which our Lord fights for us, which he casts out, but devils which also have a power to bind, devils which make us unable to speak or think. Our Lord casts out devils, but these same devils are clever and powerful. If defeated at first, They will seek to return to the soul, to the house, which has been cleansed, swept, and garnished.

Why do we hear so much about devils during Lent? Speaking in a series of interviews almost 40 yrs ago about the challenges which face the Christian today, then Cardinal Ratzinger offers a pertinent description:

The more one understands the holiness of God, the more one understands the opposite of what is holy, namely, the deceptive masks of the devil. Jesus Christ himself is the greatest example of this, before him, before the Holy One, Satan could not keep hidden and was constantly compelled to show himself. So one might say that the disappearance of the awareness of the demonic indicates a related decline in holiness. The devil can take refuge in his favourite element, anonymity, if he is not exposed by the radiance of the person united to Christ.¹

‘The devil can take refuge in his favourite element, anonymity’. C S Lewis expressed this principle well. In an imaginative account of a senior devil instructing a junior devil about how to capture and enslave a soul, the senior devil counsels that it’s best to keep people ignorant about his existence. In the words of the senior devil:

I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. [the patient is the soul the devil wants to destroy] The fact that ‘devils’ are predominately *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.²

¹ The Ratzinger Report, An exclusive interview , with Vittorio Messori, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison, Ignatius Press, 1985, pp. 143 ff.

² The Screwtape Letters.

There is a lot which is confused and false about popular descriptions or ideas of devil or the demonic. it's possible to be too interested in them. However, it is also a trick of the devil to use those confusions to conceal himself. Devils appear so often near our Lord because his light reveals them. I don't want to suggest that this is simple. The problem of divine action, the problem of understanding how God animates and acts in the world is a real theological challenge. Discerning how demonic spirits act has something of this same problem. Not for today.

On the other hand, it may be a stubborn refusal to say what is before our eyes to recognize the presence of the demons. Again, in the words of the Pope Emeritus:

Anyone who has a clear picture of the dark sides of the age in which we lives sees forces at work which aim to disintegrate the relationships among men.

³Genuine courage does not close is eyes to the dimensions of danger but considers danger realistically.⁴

let us not succumb to the popular idea that we can solve all problems with a little good will. Even if we did not have faith, but were genuine realists, we would be convinced that, without the assistance of a higher power, we are prisoners of a baneful history ... If we remain united to Christ, we can be sure of victory.⁵

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace

This description of a strong man armed is a description of the devil. What is the source of the devil's strength? Well, in a large part, we give it, we supply arms to our enemy.⁶

Of course, in its origin, the devil is not an independent power, all the strength which the devil has comes from God. The devil is a creature, among the greatest of the angels in wisdom and strength. Scripture suggests that some angels rebelled against God. Our Lord often describes the purpose of his self-offering as defeating the devil, overcoming the prince of this world. He has defeated the devil, and yet the devil and his fallen angels still have a kind of power to influence us and to tempt us. What are the devil's strength? A perverted wisdom and strength which twists the truth and goodness of God, yes.

But also, and more significantly, we supply arms to the devil—we arm the devil ourselves. The devil does not have power over us unless in some way we give the devil that power.

St Paul exhorts us to walk in love. When we choose to walk in unlove, we walk toward disintegration , away from ourselves. St Paul gives list of what this looks like in many

³ 'The fear of God is faith, something very different from a fear which enslaves, a fear of demons , But the fear of God is also very different from a pretentious daring which does not want to see the seriousness of reality.' These quotations re-arrange the order of the text.

⁴ Ratzinger interviews quoted above.

⁵ 'Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might Put on the whole armour of God...'

⁶ This idea comes from John Keble, 'Deadly Peace Of The Unawakened Conscience' Sermon XIX from *Sermons for the Christian Year: Sermons for Lent to Passiontide* THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, S. LUKE xi. 21. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace,his goods are in peace."

places – here, his short list includes sexual immorality, every kind of impurity, and covetousness.⁷

Why does St Paul connect sexual immorality with covetousness? I can only point to the challenge, and again, this is simplistic: Covetousness here appears as a kind of insatiable greed which does not take account of the needs of others or consequences for others. In very counter-cultural view of the dignity of the human person which we have in Christ, the language of our bodies expresses the language of our souls. In our culture, it's ok to consent to use one another for a short time until we no longer consent to use one another – that is a kind of covetousness.

St Paul also describes 'obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking' as a kind of imaginative participation in immorality. Letting our heart go out toward what is unlove is to move toward disintegration or unbeing, even if we hold back from the actions themselves.

We supply arms to the devil when we choose against the love we see in Christ. remember, this is the love that the disciples and which we could not see back before the beginning of Lent. To chose against the love of Christ is to worship another God. It's very important that we know this. Again, St Paul says that the person who rejects the character of goodness and wisdom we see in Christ, the covetous person is an idolater. We don't need little statues of false gods to be idolators. The organizing principles which govern our lives are what we worship.

'An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I 'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure."' ⁸

Perhaps now we can understand why we have been considering our struggle with demons and possession:

To be 'vexed by a devil' means to have one's will fixed and focused upon some spiritual perversion. It is to have one's personality wholly absorbed with some worldly lust, some idle curiosity, some vain ambition. It is to have one's will fixed upon some finite good, as though it were divine.⁹

Even good things can become idols when we love them in the wrong way. When our principles are no longer ordered by the love and goodness of God, good things can become idols.

Oh dear, This is confusing, a bit frightening. We can feel lost – how do I know when something good has become an idol for me? How do I recognize the voice of Christ, the voice of goodness, when so many other voices are clamouring for my attention?

This is in part why our Lord warns us about not leaving the house swept and garnished. We cannot get our bearings by looking at what is wrong,

⁷ **3** But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5**

⁸ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

⁹ It means to be devoted to some false god, devoted to a worldly idol of one sort or another." Even if "our vocabulary ... has changed a good deal since ancient times, .. the realities of spiritual life remain much the same." Robert Crouse, Lent 2, from Lectionary Central

Do you remember the blind man we encountered outside of Jericho on the Sunday before ash Wednesday. he pictured to us the blindness of the disciples, he pictures our own limited capacity to see. Our Lord told his disciples what love would look like, in his dying and rising again, and they could not see it. We need not be alarmed by our confusions.

Remember again, our Lord did not simply heal the blind man who cried out to him, Son of David, have mercy on me. He first asked, ‘what wilt thou that I should do unto thee’?

God’s love does not simply act on us in a mechanical way. Rather, we are need to seek it for ourselves. Again, Christ draws near, he comes again today, in this worship, he comes in the voice of conscience, but he passes by , but also waits on us.

St Paul fills this out for us: walk as children of light; (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works

We are invited to make this our request – to seek God’s goodness, and righteousness, and truth. And we are being warned, if we make that request, it will not be that our lives are suddenly free from conflict. Yes, we will have a clear purpose, and a sense of peace in that. but to choose goodness, and righteous, and truth will put us into conflict with whatever we find in ourselves which is not goodness, righteousness and truth. Yes, there will be conflict with the world, but there will first be conflict with ourselves

Next week is often referred to as refreshment Sunday. Next week in the feeding of the Church in the wilderness, the focus is less on what we turn away from, but rather on what we turn toward. Today, we have considered again the struggle which is part of the journey to Jerusalem. But we cannot find our way toward the love and goodness of God by focussing on the conflict. We are invited to walk in love, to come into the light, to let our eyes adjust.

A final piece of practical advice. St Paul warns us that ‘r even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.’ 2 Cor 11.14

If we are trying to make the journey toward righteousness, his goodness we will see in Jerusalem, in rising as well as in dying , we will have a struggle before us.¹⁰

The devil, who has lost the first round when we seek to walk in love, will come back disguised as an angel of light, he will say that we cannot do it, don’t we know that our sins cannot be forgiven, or that we are too damaged, that we are not worth it, or it’s too late. Or we may be tempted to resentment against God. This will be the spirit coming back. No worry, we are invited to choose again whatever we have seen of righteousness , and goodness and truth. Our Lord will not pass by, he will ask us what we want and seek.

¹¹But, let’s not be surprised by the struggle, but let us instead hear the voice of Christ – He seeks to open our eyes, to lift us up, to draw us to himself, and to pour on us and within us the good gifts we seek. In him, the House is not empty, it overflows.

¹⁰ We will seek to turn away from what is unlove and disintegration. This will be painful, but it will be an affirmation of how we are, it is a denial of despair, it is choosing what God wants for us.

¹¹ The spirit that tells us that it’s pointless, that there is no hope, that we’re not worth it, is not from God, it may be the devil disguised as an angel of light, or it may be our own voice