

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The devil, the chief of the Apostles writes, is like a lion – a ferocious carnivore who sees in you nothing more than a quick meal. He is not a lion that can be tamed. He is evil and conniving, caring only about himself, willing to hurt and harm and ruin others. He cares nothing for your soul, indeed, he seeks to destroy it.

So Peter calls the devil your adversary. Anyone or anything that seeks to destroy you is rightly an adversary. But the devil is not an adversary like other enemies. He specializes in sneak attacks. He knows your weaknesses better than you do. He shows no mercy. His desires are only evil.

And although he is the most malevolent of all adversaries, you have not always been, as the Apostle directs, sober and vigilant to avoid the devil and his wiles. You have not always resisted him as St. Peter exhorts. And St. Peter knew well the devil's wiles, for as the Lord revealed, the devil sought to sift Peter like wheat. And, truth be told, like Peter you have yielded to the devil's temptations. For in your flesh the devil has a partner in crime.

All men are sinners. But there are different kinds of sinners. There are those who sin crudely, outwardly, as a matter of course. They seem to have no shame, no morals, no sense of right or wrong. They live their lives in sin, and feel no remorse. To them there is no truth, there is no right or wrong, they fear no judgment, and no one around them is safe from their sinful ways.

Then there are those sinners of an equally sinful heart, but who feign external righteousness. These are more dangerous than the first. Inwardly they are no different than the coarse, unrepentant sinner. But outwardly they put on a show of religiosity and piety. They are, as our Lord called them, whitewashed tombs – bright and clean on the outside, full of death and darkness on the inside. These multiply the sins of the first in their willful deceit. It was to sinners such as this that the Lord spoke the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

He receives sinners and eats with them. The Scribes and Pharisees complained about this. They would have nothing to do with those they considered unclean, all the while their transgressions exceeded those of the sinners they spurned. They judged other men, and condemned those they found unclean. But the Son of Man came not to judge, rather to save that which is lost. In this time of grace He sees sinners not in judgment, but as souls worthy of redemption.

So in light of the condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees, He told them of an amazing Shepherd. That Shepherd valued the life of one true sheep enough to leave 99 externally righteous sheep in the desert of their deceit. That Shepherd seeks and finds the lost. And finding the lost sheep, He rejoices, because He loves the sheep. And He brings that sheep home, into the Flock, the Holy Church, and all heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents.

Which brings us to the third type of sinner. Their sins are no less violations of God's Holy Law. They sin as do other men. They appear outwardly to be no different. But inwardly they mourn their sins. They are convicted. They grieve their wrongdoing, not because they were caught and have to pay the price, but because they believe that their sins alienate them from God. They have heartfelt contrition over their sins, over their fallenness. They are truly sorry for their sins. They

beat their breast and confess their fault. They want to do better. They seek redemption. They hope for forgiveness. More than anything, they desire the remission of their sins and a clean slate before God. They earnestly desire to live holy lives – outwardly and inwardly.

They are the one sheep the Lord seeks. And in His great love, in His faithfulness, in His mercy and grace showered upon fallen men, He finds such sheep, for repentance has two parts – contrition and faith. It is in Him, the Good Shepherd, that they have faith. It is in Him, the Good Shepherd, that they hope.

How does the Lord seek and find the sheep? As a woman with a lamp searching for something of great value to her. The woman is the Holy Church, the Bride of Christ. The Lamp is the Gospel. Christ, who died for all men, works through His Church, through the Means of Grace, to find those who bear His image and His inscription. The saving rays of the Gospel illumine the dark corners of this fallen world. And this is where you find yourself in the Lord's Parable – lost in a darkness pierced by the brilliant Lamp of the Word of God.

It is not that you sought God. The lost sheep wanders aimlessly, constantly in danger. The lost coin can only lay there and be lost. That is how you were before the Lord sought you. But then, by the Spirit's power, the strong Word of God's Law convicted you. You came to see yourself as sinful. You came to see yourself as lost. But that realization is a fruit of faith, faith worked by the Promise, faith that believes that the Promise is for you, that Christ is for you.

So you can say with the Prophet "O Lord, I will praise You; though you were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me." There is the Law: God's anger. And there is the Gospel, God's comfort. There is your salvation. So you, you redeemed in Christ, you forgiven all your sins, can confess with joy "Behold, God is my Salvation, I will trust and not be afraid." He has found you. He has won you. He has bought you back. He has restored you to Himself by His shed Blood and miraculous resurrection.

And this He imparts to you – His salvation, His righteousness – as you are washed in water from the wells of salvation, the water comprehended with His Saving Word in the Baptismal Font. There has He done excellent things. There He has done excellent things to you. The Shepherd has found you and brought you into the safety of His Church.

"This Man receives sinners and eats with them." Thanks be to God for that. He receives you. He loves you. He gave His life for you. And this day He receives you, you declared holy by grace through faith in Him, He receives you as His blessed guest, as you receive Him in the Holy Eucharist. The Holy One of Israel is in your midst, His Body with Bread, His Blood with Wine, for you. This Man makes saints of sinners by giving them Himself to eat. And there is great joy in heaven, joy in the presence of the angels of God, over you.

Now "May the God of all grace, Who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever."

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