

“Jesus Has Power over the Powers of Hell”

St. Mark 1.21-28

4th Sunday after the Epiphany 2006

The Word of God for our sermon meditation this 4th Sunday after the Epiphany was recorded for our faith and life in the Gospel of St. Mark, the 1st chapter, verses 21-28 as read earlier.

Ever since 9/11 we had had to face real threats at home and abroad. Just in the last few weeks more threats of attacks on our soil were made and our efforts to safeguard the homeland continues. This war on terrorism is an ongoing war and one, quite honestly, will never totally cease until this present age does. Though severe blows and setbacks have been dealt to the enemy, the battle will rage and continue.

Ever since Satan's rebellion against God, the powers of Hell have been arrayed against us and Christ's church. We as the people of God are to live in this knowledge as well as the knowledge that Jesus has power over the powers of Hell. For, at one time, through sin, deception, and even possession, as indicated in our Gospel reading for today, all mankind was captive to Satan and the powers of Hell.

Just like the terrorists who like to use fear and gorilla warfare tactics, Satan, the Scriptures teach, had mankind in bondage to the fear of death. We, the Scriptures teach dwelt in darkness and were spiritually blinded by Satan's deceptions and lies. Like Adam and Eve we thought we could be our own gods and live only to find that Satan had made himself our god and we were subject to eternal death and destruction.

Like Satan and his angels, we were also condemned and damned in our sin and transgression. We who lived in darkness had good reason to fear death since when one dies in their sins they will only see the second death of eternal fire. Now, we do not remember this because we have been freed from the powers of Hell by Jesus who has power over them. For a glorious deliverance and rescue of you, me, and all who believe has been effected by Jesus when we were washed in the waters of Holy Baptism. We were snatched out of Hell's grasp and power and we were brought to the glories of heaven.

As those whom Jesus has rescued and delivered from the powers of Hell we are to live knowing that the powers of Hell are still arrayed against us as they are against Christ and His Church throughout the ages. Just as with the terrorists, Satan and the powers of Hell are constantly attacking us, looking for ways to return us to the ways of fear, of darkness, and of death.

We see glimpses of these attacks and opposition to Jesus and His Church in our Gospel reading for today. This confrontation is just one of many incidents of Jesus showing His power over the powers of Hell. Jesus casts out innumerable unclean spirits and demons throughout His public ministry ultimately breaking their power at the cross when He crushed Satan's head with His innocent sufferings and death.

This is another particular emphasis that we see St. Mark highlighting throughout his Gospel account. Jesus, from chapter 1 of the Gospel to the final chapters, is in constant battle and warfare against Satan and the powers of Hell. Time and time again the demons and unclean spirits, the fallen angels in league with Satan, acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the flesh who has the power to destroy them with a word. St. Mark, in recording Jesus' exorcisms through his Gospel demonstrates more vividly the battle between Christ and the Devil.

But this is a battle that has not ceased – not even after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible is quite plain and very clear in teaching that even now, today, this very moment, the powers of Hell are arrayed against us in battle because they never stop attacking God's people, not even when they are in church worshipping Him. Even today Satan has probably been tempting you not to pay attention to the sermon, the hymns, the worship and has been tempting you to think – why do we even use this service when the Service of Matins is so tough to sing.

We see that even during Jesus' Public Ministry that Satan had wanted to sift Peter like chaff from the wheat but Jesus intervened on Peter's behalf as St. Luke records in his Gospel "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.'"

Peter himself reminds us in his First Epistle that Satan is like an opportunistic lion circling us looking for the best time to attack. The Bible in many, many places like the Book of Job, the Book of Zechariah, and the Book of Revelation tells us how Satan, who is also known as the Adversary, is constantly accusing us and as creation's biggest tattler telling God how we have sinned and violated His will time and time again in our lives.

As God's people, since you and I have this knowledge of Satan and the powers of Hell as well as their methods, we are to live our lives always resisting Satan and the powers of Hell knowing that Jesus has power over them. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians reminds us that we do not wrestle or battle with flesh and blood when it comes to evil and wickedness in this world and our lives. No, we are actually fighting against the powers of Hell and Satan.

So says St. Paul when he writes "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Truth be told, however, most of us do not conduct our lives with this truth in mind. In fact, when you think of when you last were fighting the temptation to gossip, to bad-mouth another or blow your top, did you realize at the time that you were wrestling and fighting against Satan and the powers of Hell even as you fought those sinful impulses of your sinful self and the prodding of this wicked world?

If there is one thing that the Spirit of God constantly reminds us it is that Satan is real and he, working in conjunction with our sinful selves and this wicked world attacks you and me unrelentingly, pushing all the buttons that he knows are our weaknesses. Whether that button is pride, short-temperedness, an impulsive and gossipy tongue, and more, Satan, as Luther tells us, has had 6,000+ years of practice giving him a decided advantage.

But, in Jesus Christ, the advantage is really our since He has power over the powers of Hell. Through faith in Him we are given the power to resist and turn away the Devil and all his temptations, to resist succumbing to the siren songs of this age lest we crash into the rocks of sin and destruction. But even knowing this doesn't mean that we practice this always in our lives. We try to prepare ourselves as responsible Christians and followers of Jesus but we still sin and we still violate God's commands. Truth is we are not always successful in our battles and fights against the powers of Hell.

Though Satan leaps with delight and runs to God saying "Look at what Johnny or Susie did!" we have this as our confidence in the fight and this as our comfort when we sin – Jesus has power over the powers of Hell as shown by the casting out of the demons but more so by His death and resurrection from the dead. Even the evil and unclean spirits acknowledge Jesus' power over them when they say He has the power to destroy them.

And destroy them He does, not by a mighty wave of His hand but by His Word, by His death upon the cross of Calvary. By His death Jesus actually crushes the Serpent's head, He breaks and demolishes the powers of Hell and takes them captive subjecting them to His victory on the cross and over the grave.

Through faith in Jesus we share in that victory of our Lord over Satan and the hosts of Hell. We through faith in Jesus we have our sins forgiven us and that means Satan and the powers of Hell have nothing to hold over our heads. All of Satan's accusations, no matter how terrible the sin may be that we have committed in our lives, has been removed from us by the blood of Christ Jesus our Savior who overcame Satan and Hell at the cross and at the grave. Washed in Jesus' blood Satan has been cast off the thrones of our hearts and we have a new Lord, a new King – Jesus the crucified and resurrection Redeemer of us all.

St. John teaches in his First Epistle "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Later in his Epistle he writes "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is

in you is greater than he who is in the world." And we especially hear in the Book of Revelation these glorious words "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'"

Through faith in Jesus we have the great promises of sins forgiven and of Satan's defeat so that we by faith can resist the Devil and all the powers of Hell knowing they must flee from us when we stand in the Lord because they cannot stand against Him. With Jesus as our Champion, the powers of Hell will still attack us but they cannot succeed in the end for by faith we will see at the end of all things the destruction of the powers of Hell and we will enter eternal life when Satan and the powers of Hell will no longer be able to attack and accuse us again.

So though the attacks will come and Satan harass and afflict us, though we will fall and sin daily in our lives, though Satan and Hell will accuse us of our sins before God in heaven, we have nothing to fear, not even Hell itself, since Jesus is our Shield and Fortress, since in Jesus we have forgiveness full and free, and since in Jesus we have the assurance and guarantee that we will see Heaven's light and live there forever in its glory since Jesus, as St. Mark teaches us in his Gospel today, has power over the powers of Hell. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+