

Today is Oculi Sunday, the Third Sunday in Lent. Oculi means, “mine eyes”, getting its meaning from the Introit, where we prayed, “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord”. Our eyes and our hearts are always and forever lifted up to the Lord. We come to Him in prayer. It is from Him alone that all our help does come in our time of need. Our heavenly Father hears our prayers. Out of His great love for us, He answers our prayers according to His holy will and purpose; for our greater good. Please open the folders in your pews to the third section in Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, to the Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father. We will recite together the First Petition and its meaning.

“Hallowed be Thy name.” *What does this mean?* God’s name is certainly holy by itself but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also.

How is God’s name kept holy? God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in all of its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

When we pray, “Hallowed be Thy name” we remember that God’s holy name, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, was given to us at our baptism, and so we are called children of God, sons of the Father, united together as one in a loving and perfect relationship forever. In that relationship we are able to speak to God, having a heavenly and holy conversation with Him. When we pray this Petition, we remember the Second Commandment, which is, “You Shall Not Misuse the Name of the Lord Your God”. By this Commandment and in this Petition we promise not to curse, swear, lie or deceive our neighbor by God’s name, but to use God’s name rightly, calling upon Him in every trouble through prayer, praise and the giving of thanks. By this Petition we also promise that what we teach and confess in this congregation as faithful witnesses, and the life that we live is godly and Christian, living toward each other in mercy. Remember, we call God Father and it is our duty

and responsibility, in every way, to behave as good children so that He alone may receive from us not shame but honor and praise. We do this in Christ, for the Church and the world.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning talks about demons. Talking about demons, talking about the devil shocks a lot of people; but Jesus talks about him just as explicitly and straightforwardly as He speaks about God the Father. Jesus does so, because the devil is very real, an ever present reality in our lives. Remember, the devil, the world and our own sinful nature, are at war with us, attacking us, desiring our destruction and condemnation. On the day we were baptized the devil placed a target on our backs; he is always aiming for us. The title devil means accuser. The name Satan means enemy or opponent or deceiver. Jesus even calls him, “the father of lies”. We must watch and pray that the devil would not lead us into temptation. We must repent of our sins, and turn from that which is the source of evil in our lives because Jesus says, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.” Which Jesus explains by saying, “You cannot serve God and mammon’ and ‘He who is not with Me is against Me.’”

Jesus says that Satan has a kingdom all his own and compares him to a strong man who sits fully armed on his property guarding it, protecting it. Jesus calls Satan “the prince of darkness” and “the prince of this world”. Remember a few weeks ago, at the beginning of Lent, Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil; Satan told Jesus that this world with all of its power and glory had been delivered to him and he can give it to whomever he wants. And Jesus said, “It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve”. You cannot be in conversation with God, you cannot honestly pray our Father, if the devil is inside you.

Jesus is the world's rightful Lord, the devil is not. Jesus alone has the right to demand our obedience and loyalty. The devil is just a usurper of power he has forced his way into this world and has taken over another's possessions. The devil has seized control of this earth and created a position of power that does not belong to him. Satan has created a kingdom using stolen goods.

But Jesus says, "one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, attacks him, He takes from him all his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoils." This is what Jesus Christ Himself has done and continues to do here in this world. The reason the Son of God came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; was to destroy the works of the devil. The Son of God came down from heaven to rip His rightful possession out of the devil's grubby hands, restoring it to the good and right relationship the Holy Trinity intended. The worst thing the devil did was to destroy the original relationship between God and mankind. The worst thing the devil did was to force God to remove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, separating God and His love from His creation. The devil made his mark on our innermost desires so there is something in us that is just as incompatible with God as Satan is himself. Because of our sin, we reject God, we hate God, we want nothing to do with God, we find it better to be far removed and separated from God.

But thanks be to God, that the devil does not have the last word, the final say. That could have been the final victory. Adam and Eve falling into sin could have been the end. But Jesus Christ eliminated that victory when He took our guilt, and all the consequences of our sin and condemnation upon Himself and died for us. Jesus has redeemed us lost and condemned persons, He has forgiven us, He has purchased and won us from all sins, from death and from the power of

the devil; not with God and silver but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

Jesus has done this, so that we would no longer be deaf mutes, but that we would be able to be in a holy conversation with God our heavenly Father, that we would be His own dear children, that we would live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

That is why we pray, "Hallowed be Thy name". It is through these words that we remember that preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified, risen, ascended, and promising to come again to judge the quick and the dead must be proclaimed to the world. It is through preaching and teaching of the pure and holy Word of God that souls are freed from all guilt and shame. That is why what we teach and what we believe is so important. It is through the Administration of the Blessed Sacraments, as Jesus instituted them that the truth and grace of God is distributed and received. That is why what we do and how we do it is so important. It is by these means of grace, that you lift up you hearts and eyes unto the Lord receiving gracious gifts from His very hands and mouth, this morning and every Sabbath Day; that Jesus, the strong man, does overthrow the devil in our lives, removing him from our very presence and setting us free to be His own. We are the spoils whom Jesus possessed through the shedding of His own blood and He is not about to let us go. In Baptism, we have been cleansed and exorcised of every demon and evil spirit, the Holy Spirit now lives with us. Through Baptism we have been called to hold fast to the Holy Word of God and His Sacraments that the evil spirits would not return and the devil would have no power over us. It is in this way that we are able to live before God and neighbor in works of charity and love and mercy, witnessing the loving presence of God among us now and always. Amen.