

✠ James 4:1-12 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

The devil does not usually attack in obvious ways. He is smarter than that. He attacks in ways that appear harmless or even good for you. Thus he attacked Eve with the promise that the fruit would do her good, make her wise. And he attacked our Lord with the seemingly harmless act of satisfying hunger by changing stones into bread. He attacked Peter with the seemingly pious notion that Jesus should never have to suffer and die. And he attacked Judas with the seemingly pious notion that money should not be wasted on perfumes and oils to anoint the feet of any man, no matter how holy that man may be. And he attacks you with the seemingly pious thought that the more of the Law you fulfill, the more you'll resist him and keep from sinning.

This tactic of the devil works well, phenomenally well. And it is his only strategy: spin the lie so that it looks beneficial and even pious. And the greatest spinning of the lie that he has done since Eve took the cursed fruit to her husband, is telling you that you can resist him with the Law.

The Word of God says to us, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." And the devil chimes in, mimicking the Word of God, sounding pious. "Yes, resist me. Resist me by not killing your neighbor; resist me by not looking at that woman, you can do it. You mean well, you try hard, just try a little harder. Resist me by reading the Bible; you know you're supposed to. Resist me by thinking pious thoughts. But you can't do that, can you? Even when you pray the prayer of the Church, calling on God as your Father, your mind wanders and your thoughts go elsewhere. Well, no matter, tell others that you resist me. Put on a good veneer of piety and godly living. Then they'll think you a good Christian, a decent person. Then you can help them when they stumble. Then you can chastise them with brotherly love saying, 'You shouldn't do that. You need to act more Christian.' Yes, you're good at resisting me. You never do what I say to do."

But we can't resist the devil with the Law. If we think we resist him and his temptations when we are being good, when we're acting right, then we think we resist him by the Law. For the Law is nothing more than requirements to be holy. But we can't think enough pious thoughts; we can't read the Bible enough; we can't pray enough; we can't go to church enough. The Law does not resist the devil; it invites him. Thus the apostle writes, "when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died." Sin, afforded the opportunity by the Law, produces all manner of evil in you. So when you try and resist the devil by the Law, saying, "I know I shouldn't do or think this," then the accuser stands before you accusing you and tempting you to do better and try harder. But you can't because you have about you the old Adam. The harder you try to fulfill the Law by not hating, not coveting, not adulterating, not lying, the more you find that you do all of these things and the further you drift from God.

Until finally you buy into the lie that though you do these sinful things, you're basically a good person because you don't mean to do them and you are upset and shamed when you do them and you tell others that when they do them they are sinning and behaving badly. And you're back to square one: trying to resist the devil by doing the things that you think make

you righteous and clean. And you try to help your brother overcome his sin and temptation by sharing in the lie you've bought into, that if you do enough good things you'll resist the devil. It is a vicious circle that takes you and your brothers and sisters deeper than Dante's Hell ever imagined you could go.

So then how do you resist the devil that he will flee from you? How do you overcome the anger, the bitterness, the envy, the hatred, the lusts; the temptations of the evil one? By the Gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation. The Law affords sin the opportunity to seize you and master you; the Gospel frees you from that mastery. Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. Not by trying to fulfill the Law, but by living in the Gospel: your sins are forgiven.

The devil accuses only when there is something to accuse. But when that sin is taken away, then he flees because there is nothing there for him to throw in your face. Draw near to God not by trying to be more godly, obeying the precepts of the Law, but by confessing your sins. For God does not desire sacrifices and offerings, things of the Law, but a broken and contrite heart He will not despise. He gives grace to the humble.

This is not to your shame but to your benefit. Don't buy the lie that says you can overcome temptation and sin by doing more of the things of righteous requirements. Rather, overcome temptation and sin by standing on the promises of God your Savior that for Christ's sake you are righteous and pure, clean and holy. He has overcome temptation for you. Then when the tempter comes, he will find one who does not give into temptation, not you, for you are weak, but Christ. He is the One who does not give in to temptation; He is the One that keeps you from the jaws of the accuser.

Surround yourself with the Gospel. Hang crucifixes in your homes, not empty crosses, but crosses adorned with the precious Savior. Crucifixes are not the image of a dead Jesus but of the dying Savior who dies for you. Pray the Our Father. Sing hymns. Pray. Not the prayers of the world, asking for things that they may spend them on their passions, but the prayers of the faithful, "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." Pray the prayers of one who is a sinner but believes the promises of God in Christ.

Read and memorize the Catechism. It is not just some theologian's ideas or thoughts on certain matters. It is a book of instruction in the Gospel, a prayer book for the Church. Many will say that they read their Bibles and that's better than any Catechism. But only a fool tries to navigate the seas on a cloudy night. Say the Creed. And come and eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For His body is true food and His blood is true drink and He is able to keep you. Do these things not to fulfill the Law, for you cannot, but to always keep you humble before the Lord.

Then He will exalt you. Not by making you famous or having everyone look up to you, or by giving you positions of authority, but by saving you from the devil. He will keep your foot from stumbling and your heart from growing cold. He will sustain and strengthen you, not so that you can do it on your own, but so that you more heavily lean on Him. The strong do not battle temptation; they let the Lord battle it for them by coming and attending the teachings of the apostles, the breaking of bread, and the prayers of the Church.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠