

Let us start this morning by noticing two things presented to us in the collect. The first is we notice the clause, "We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves." The second is that we notice the categories of body and soul. In the collect we prayed, "Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul." We are praying both for defense from attacks and maladies that happen to our physical selves, to our bodies, and from evil thoughts that may attack our minds, our thought life, our inner life.

Now these categories of body and soul are, in fact, biblical. Jesus said it wasn't what went into a man that defiled him, but what came out of his heart, what he said and did. Christ recognizes here that we all have both an inner life and an outer, physical life. The inner life is comprised of our thoughts and desires and emotions. It is this intangible, spiritual core of our being that reaches for God, for the transcendent. Our outer life, our life of the body, is that part which interacts with the physical world around us.

We should note as well that we must have bodies in order to interact with each other. We use our eyes to see each other's bodies and to note the emotions and actions of others. We use our mouths to create vibrations in the air that are interpreted by another's ears as speech or music. The world touches our souls through our bodies and our souls touch the world through our bodies. We have heard about non-verbal communication, but we all know that this isn't telepathy. Our thoughts don't magically pop into someone else's mind. Non-verbal communication is the message we send to each other through our bodies by our actions and facial expressions instead of our words, but the point is that our bodies are our interface with creation.

Now, of course, humans aren't the only persons in creation. There are also purely spiritual

beings. These must interact with us, without a mediating body. For instance, we communicate with God in prayer, and He speaks to us in various ways. Sometimes He might speak to our mind directly when we become sensitive enough and still enough to listen. Importantly, however, He also communicates with us through the encouragements we give each other or through various other means as well. God also has angel messengers that come to us in dreams or visions or through subtly influencing our hearts, our thoughts. Sometimes we talk about God closing a door, and we all know that this is not a literal door that closes, but that a life option we had figuratively closes. It is no longer available. And let us also not neglect that God speaks to us through His Word as well. Psalm 119:11 reads, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee." In the Word, we have rather direct guidance for how we ought to conduct ourselves in the world. All of these are ways in which God communicates to us. Most of them, and I would argue the most common and direct ways, are found right here ... in the Church.

Of course we also must be clear here that not all spirits are benevolent. There are many spiritual beings who have rebelled against God and who desire our destruction. During Lent we are emphatically reminded of this. Last week, we discussed how Christ was tempted by the devil. This week, we see the Canaanite woman's daughter vexed with a devil. We don't have details of this specific case, but somehow this girl was controlled so strongly by an evil spirit that she was unable to live a normal life. Her soul was afflicted by this demon to the extent that her body was significantly, if not completely, outside of her control. Next week, we will read about how Jesus was accused by the pharisees of being in league with the devil. Given these biblical stories and others, we must acknowledge that the presence of demons is real. Over time, we have found some physical causes for afflictions, but the modern sense is to attribute all afflictions to physical causes and to deny the spiritual realm. We have no biblical justification for doing this.

We do, then, conclude, that demons, evil spiritual beings, are real. But how do demons influence us? I would suggest that for those outside of the Kingdom of God, who have not expressed faith and received baptism and the Holy Spirit, that demons have relatively open access to the soul, to the emotions and mind. In fact, this is our default condition until our souls are brought into the Kingdom of God. Most people only need to be influenced subtly to keep them from God. Most unbelievers don't need a lot of attention from evil spiritual forces. We do a fine enough job on our own of pursuing our selfish desires to the neglect of God and neighbors.

How are these demons displaced from the individual? By the Word of God proclaimed to the lost which is the spirit of God going forth in the world and transforming it into the Kingdom of God. The demons are banished by Christ preached in the world. Let us understand that when this happens, these evil spiritual beings are not happy, and they will begin a campaign against the believer to undermine his faith. We will be subject to attacks through our bodies – hardships, sickness, injury, which leads us to doubt in our souls. We have a direct example of this through Job in the Old Testament and with Paul in the New. Demons also are very good at leading us to believe falsehoods to lead us from the faith, so as the collect says, we are attacked both in body and soul.

We should also mention here that we believers are always under attack to some extent. When we are doing well and are comfortable, then we become spiritually lazy and prideful. When things don't go our way, then we think that God has abandoned us. We become discouraged when we lose the job or become injured. This life will always present us with challenges the end of which leads us closer to God or further away. The question, then, is how do we remain faithful and grow through these challenges? How do we stay connected to Christ through thick and thin?

As Christians, baptized into the Body of Christ, we might have a tendency to think that we have everything covered on our own. Add to this that when we examine our hearts, at some deep level we don't like what we find there because we are afraid to really be honest with our insecurities. It is much safer to isolate so we don't have to be vulnerable with one another.

But this is one of the lies that we are told by the devil's team because by keeping us separated, he keeps us from growing in holiness and having a greater impact for the Kingdom of God. We all struggle with our inner lives, our disordered loves and our sinful desires, our concupiscence as they are referred to by the epistle lesson. These along with all of our faulty ideas, work to undermine the faith that we have professed. If we want to be more influenced by the Spirit of God, then we must deny that impulse to pull away, and we must commit to regularly participate in the worshiping community of God. We are saved into a family, into a community, so we must not despise the Bride of Christ, the Church.

When under attack, we just think that we need to pray harder or to have more profound quiet times. Certainly, each of us should desire a richer prayer life with God, but sometimes this is a mask we put up. We will sometimes fall into a mode where we feel like we need to fix ourselves first before we fellowship with our brothers and sisters so we stay aloof. But may I suggest that it is easier for our enemy to influence us in destructive ways if we keep distant. We think we are addressing our issues on our own, but didn't we just pray something to the effect of, "We have no power of ourselves to help ourselves?" If you want Christ's power in your life, then stay close to Christ's Body.

What we should be doing is taking heed of the example set for us by the Caananite woman in today's gospel. Her daughter was under severe demonic influence, and I am sure she had tried every possible remedy suggested to no avail. She knew that Christ was her only hope. Yet she was an outsider to the people of the covenant to whom Christ was sent. His work of

redemption for the world began from within the Jewish people and culture which was the focus of His ministry. Yet she knew enough to understand that Christ was the promised one, the messiah, because she identifies Him as the Son of David, a messianic title. Her first plea was, "Have mercy upon me, O thou Son of David."

In this interaction, she is rebuffed by the people of God – the disciples want her to go away. They shut her down in her need and vulnerability. Unfortunately, this is exactly what keeps us from coming to each other with our problems. There is a real risk that we too might be rejected. May we as the Church never act in such a way as the disciples did.

Yet as we read, we see here that her desperation is greater than her shame. She even persisted having been rebuffed by Christ Himself. The gospel narrative continues, "Then she came and worshipped him saying, Lord help me." Though the time was not yet come for her to be integrated fully into the covenant people, Christ answers and defends those who approach with faith, worshiping Him in Spirit and in Truth.

Interestingly, this woman's pleas of, "Lord, have mercy upon me," and "Lord, help me," should sound a note of familiarity with us. We say the *Kryie Eleison* every Sunday acknowledging that we too are completely dependent upon Christ for health of body and soul. As we see here, this has been the church's plea since the beginning.

As English Catholics, we are blessed to have such a deeply grounded spiritual foundation in the Church. We are not left to work out our spirituality on our own. We simply need to press in to the disciplines that we already have in the Church, into the worship already established. If you are struggling spiritually, make it a priority to join us in daily prayer. It might not fit into your schedule, but then again it might. Take advantage of the 7 pm opportunities as well on Monday night and on Wednesday night. These corporate gatherings with the Body are

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foundational for your personal devotions. Let us make this Lenten journey, and this life journey, together.

Christianity is not meant to be a singular endeavor. It is at heart corporate so let us not exile ourselves to the margins of God's people. Let us be quick and eager to worship Him, not just individually, but within the family Christ came to establish. Let us find our protection, soul and body, in Christ and His Body. He welcomes us to His table as His children. Come then to the gracious feast set for us.

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