

2 S. after Pentecost      6/6/21  
 Mark 3:20-35              B

## GOSPEL LESSON, THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

“He is possessed by Beelzebul ... by the prince of demons he casts out the demons”. By calling Jesus “Beelzebul,” the scribes hope not only to discredit Him, but to identify Him with the devil. The name Beelzebul is meant to recall the incident in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of 2 Kings. Ahaziah, the king of Israel, was sick. But rather than send men to the prophet Elijah to inquire of the Lord, he sent them to inquire of Baal-zebub, a Philistine idol. God revealed this to Eijah who then met the men and told them to go back and tell the king that his folly cost him his life. The scribes in our lesson wanted very much for the crowd to associate Jesus with a Philistine idol. And remember, according to the Law of Moses in Leviticus 20:27, a sorcerer must be put to death.

You know one of my favorite questions to ask you – one of the top 3, in fact – is WHAT DOES GOD DO WITH SIN? The answer: HE FORGIVES IT! And along comes Jesus this morning and says,

“Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

We hear those words of Jesus and our natural thought is, “Summer’s here. But, its already 100-degrees and now I’m going to hell, because God will never forgive me. I did it. I know I did. I committed the sin against the Holy Spirit.” This morning, let’s talk about the sin against the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (cf. 1 Jn 1:7). Yet, here is Jesus Himself talking about a sin that will never to be forgiven and the one who commits this sin is guilty of an eternal sin.

Before addressing the sin against the Holy Spirit, it is good to

remember that theology is nothing but definition and distinction. To help us understand what the sin against the Holy Spirit is, let me begin by saying what this sin is not.

Is the sin against the Holy Spirit unbelief? Jesus instructs us to make disciples of all nations. If unbelief were unforgivable, why would our Lord Christ Himself command us to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers? The Bible clearly teaches, “[God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2).”

We would add in this light, what about those who have fallen from the faith into unbelief? These are they who have been baptized, at their confirmation swore that they would suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the Lord’s Church. Yet, enticed by the devil, the world, and their own flesh, they have wandered from the faith. Have they committed the unforgivable sin? The answer is “no”. Even though there is no faith in their heart, they can still, like the Prodigal Son, repent and confess the gifts God has given them in their baptism. So, unbelief is not the sin against the Holy Spirit.

What about those who have been excommunicated? Our *Small Catechism* teaches us,

What is the purpose of excommunication? Excommunication is not intended to punish the sinner, but to lead him or her to repentance and faith (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 230).

Excommunication results from unrepentance and is intended to lead the person to repentance, so excommunication is not the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Some believe that the unforgivable sin is suicide. Suicide is the taking of one’s own life. Suicide is a breaking of the 5th Commandment,

so, yes, suicide is a sin. But, we must remember that sin does not condemn to hell. Understand me clearly on this -- sin does not condemn; it is unbelief that condemns. If sin condemned, we would all be condemned, because we all daily sin much.

My point is this: If we are going to say suicide is the unforgivable sin, then what do we do with all the other commandments? Do we make those unforgivable, as well?

You know, by now, my well-used example. Pastor is killed in a sad and tragic car accident on Highway 49. The speed limit is, of course, 65 mph, but the Highway Patrol does an investigation and concludes, without any doubt and with all certainty, that pastor was traveling 90 mph on Highway 49 when the accident occurred. This means pastor died breaking the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment and died in sin. So, is his soul in heaven or hell? By the way, are you going to give him Christian Burial here at the church?

When we say that we are saved by grace through faith alone, apart from works – that is exactly what we mean. We are saved by faith ... alone. The only thing that condemns a person to hell is the heart that has no faith in Christ. The sin against the Holy Spirit is not suicide.

Now, that we have looked at what the sin against the Holy Spirit is not, let us look at what it is.

Volumes have been written trying to tell us exactly what this sin is. The best way for us to understand these words is to look at the context in which Jesus speaks these words.

Before Jesus spoke the words of our lesson, a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus. And, Jesus healed him. The Evangelist Matthew tells us, “All the people were astonished and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David (Mt 12:23)’?” The people knew this

was a miracle and that Jesus could do this miracle only because He was the Son of God.

Jesus' opponents had to have some way to explain how Jesus had the power to perform the miracles -- they certainly could not deny that He could perform them -- so they say, "by the prince of demons He casts out demons." In other words, His opponents were saying that His ability to cast out demons came from the devil himself. Which brings me back to my opening words. By invoking "Beelzebul," they were trying to not only discredit Jesus, but to associate Him with a false god.

To which Jesus answers, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Jesus shows the folly of their claim. He proves that He is "very God of very God" by casting out the demons because He is more powerful than the devil. And, the devil's rule will come to an end when He crushed the ancient foe's head on Calvary.

It is here, in this context, that Christ warned them against the one sin which, unlike all other sins, is not forgiven. So, if we are to define the sin against the Holy Spirit, it would be this: it is a rejection of the truth that Jesus is "very God of very God," and then committing blasphemy by saying that Jesus' ability to perform miracles, including casting out demons, is from the devil.

Now that we know what the sin against the Holy Spirit is, we ask: Does the sin against the Holy Spirit still occur today? The answer is: Yes, these words are a warning addressed to the Christians of all times, you and me this very day.

Which leads us to the most intriguing question of all: Have I done it? Have I committed the sin against the Holy Spirit?

Satan, the father of all lies, whispers in your ear many lies, the least

not of which is that you have done it, you have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit and now there is no forgiveness for you. We must ever remember that he is a liar, and the father of lies.

Many torture themselves with the despairing fear of being guilty of this sin for which there is no forgiveness. On the other hand, those who have actually committed this sin are not concerned about it at all. They are not at all sorry for it. Their heart remains hard. They could care less if they have committed this sin.

Let me say this as simply as I can: If you think you have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, you have not! Your fear that you may have committed this sin is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart of faith. Your desire to be right with God is a sign of the faith in your heart.

There is only one thing that will deliver us from the fear of having committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. We must turn our heart, mind, and thoughts wholly to the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. We must remember our baptism, when God marked us as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. When we hear the absolution pronounced over us, we must rejoice that our sins are forgiven because Christ died on the cross “for me”. When we eat our Lord’s Body and drink His blood, we remember that His body and blood was given into death “for you.”

Faith always clings to Christ alone. He who called us is faithful. He, who began this good work in us, will bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.