Friday of the Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Lk* 11:15-26): When Jesus had driven out a demon, some of the crowd said: “By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons.” Others, to test him, asked him for a sign from heaven.

But he knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks and overcomes him, he takes away the armor on which he relied and distributes the spoils. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

“When an unclean spirit goes out of someone, it roams through arid regions searching for rest but, finding none, it says, ‘I shall return to my home from which I came.’ But upon returning, it finds it swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits more wicked than itself who move in and dwell there, and the last condition of that man is worse than the first.”

“Some of the crowd said: “By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons.”

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Today we look on in astonishment as Jesus is absurdly “accused” of driving out demons “by Beelzebul, the prince of demons” (Lk 11:15). It is difficult to imagine a greater good—to cast out, to drive away from souls the devil, the instigator of evil—and, at the same time, to hear the most serious accusation—to do so, precisely, by the power of the devil himself. It is truly a baseless accusation, revealing profound blindness and envy on the part of the Lord’s accusers. Even today, without realizing it, we eliminate at the

root the right of others to disagree, to be different and to have their own positions contrary to and even opposed to ours.

Those who live trapped in political, cultural, or ideological dogmatism easily look down on anyone who disagrees, dismissing their entire agenda and questioning their competence—and even their honesty. Consequently, a political or ideological opponent becomes a personal enemy. Confrontation devolves into insults and aggression. An atmosphere of intolerance and violent mutual exclusion can then lead us to the temptation to somehow eliminate the person we perceive as an enemy.

In such a climate, it becomes easy to justify attacks on others—even murder—if the victim is not one of us. How many people suffer today in this atmosphere of intolerance and mutual rejection that is so often felt in public institutions, workplaces, assemblies, and political confrontations!

Together, we must create conditions and an atmosphere of tolerance, mutual respect, and fair debate in which we can gradually find paths to dialogue. And we Christians—far from hardening our positions or falsely sanctifying them by manipulating God and equating Him with our own views—must follow the Jesus who corrected His disciples when they wanted to stop others from driving out demons in His name, telling them: “Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you" (Lk 9:50). "When Christ entrusts the sheep to the shepherds, the entire number of shepherds is reduced to the body of one shepherd" (Saint Augustine).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "When Christ came, he banished the devil from our hearts, in order to build in them a temple for himself. Let us therefore do what we can with his help, so that our evil deeds will not deface that temple." (Saint Caesarius of Arles)

- "The Evil One always seeks to spoil God’s work, sowing division in the human heart, between body and soul, between the individual and God, in interpersonal, social and international relations... The Evil One sows discord; God creates peace." (Benedicto XVI)

- "The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign..." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 395)