

Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray. This is what he does for us. As we pray the prayer he has taught us, we learn to depend on God for everything, asking him as dear children ask their dear father. Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray. But then he began to teach them something else. He drove a mute demon out of a man. In this way, he teaches his Christians to confess his Word. As the devil strives to take our faith away, Jesus teaches us to confess the Word of God, which alone silences the devil. With prayer and God's Word, we have all the weapons we need against the devil's accusations and lies. It's as the hymn goes:

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,  
O Christians, lest the Foe destroy you,  
For Satan has designed your fall.  
Wield God's Word, a weapon glorious!  
Against each foe you'll be victorious;  
Our God will set you o'er them all.

Confessing the Word of Christ is what Christians do. It is the mark that a Christian has faith. The devil kills the faith of countless Christians by taking their confession away from them. He makes them spiritually mute. They are embarrassed to confess what God's Word says. They then cower in the face of those who get offended by the truth. They reduce God's truth to a watered down version, which the godless world is able to swallow without gagging. They don't stand with those who speak the truth without compromise. Instead, they sympathize with those who are offended at Christ and his teaching.

When I was a student at the University of Minnesota, Morris, I enjoyed the blessing of living with my brother who encouraged me in the truth of God's Word, admonished me toward holy living, and comforted me with the gospel of Christ crucified for my sins. We enjoyed mutual conversations and consolation as we lived among unbelievers who resented us for confessing God's truth. Whether it was because of our stance against abortion and sexual immorality or because we held that Jesus is the only way to heaven through his death on the cross, we were sometimes met with hostility. We therefore needed this consolation from each other. I needed my brother to confess Christ. He needed me to confess Christ. We needed to hear the people at church confess and sing about Christ. We needed to hear our pastor preach Christ. We needed this in the midst of the devil's temptations and the wisdom of the godless world. When our sinful flesh and desires would rather seek approval of those who hate Christ's Word, we needed to learn to confess Christ's Word.

The devil wants you to be mute to the Word of Christ. Because he knows that, if he can get the words of Christ out of your mouth, then he can get them out of your heart as well. If he can get you to be silent when people mock and deny God's Word, then he knows that he can harden your heart. If the devil can make you spiritually mute, then he can make you spiritually dead. Instead of filling your mouth with prayers to God he would fill it with filthy talk that makes light of perversions and shameful behavior such as fornication and drunkenness – talk that, as St. Paul says, should not even be named among us. But don't be deceived by this! God created your ears to hear his Word, and he created your mouth to confess his name.

Jesus therefore teaches us to confess him. He teaches us to confess his holy name by casting the devil away. The devil is strong. He is armed with lies and temptations that have accomplished the

breakdown of families, governments, and entire nations. When he tears down these pillars, he causes disorder not only in your life but also in your conscience and heart. It is when he and his wicked spirits occupy the heart and mind that they have managed to drag countless souls to hell.

The devil is certainly strong. But Jesus is the stronger Man. He conquered the devil with his own death, shedding his blood to take away our sins. Against the devil's temptations, he strengthens us with his Spirit and Word, which alone declare God's favor and peace to us. Being baptized into his death and resurrection, he has made us alive to God. He therefore teaches us to confess his death as our death. He gives us hope to confess with a good conscience before our God.

When Jesus drove out the mute demon, he was accused of casting out demons with the power of the devil. But why would Jesus be casting out demons if he was part of the devil's kingdom? That wouldn't make any sense. A house divided against itself can't stand. Jesus then pointed out to his accusers that even their own sons were casting out demons. You see, he had just sent out 72 sons of Israel to preach the arrival of his Kingdom, even giving them the authority to cast out demons. When a city refused to repent and believe that God's reign had arrived in the coming of Christ, then Jesus commanded them to wipe even the dust of that city off of their sandals as a sign of judgment against them. Jesus therefore tells those who are rejecting him that their own sons will be their judges. Those who refuse to confess with Christ's church will be judged by Christ's church.

Jesus therefore warns, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Those who would rather criticize the teachings of Jesus than gather around to hear and learn it are those who sow seeds of discord among brethren. They cause division and strife among the children of God as they scatter Christ's sheep. It's as the Proverb says (Prov 10:17): "Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray."

Jesus teaches us that we are in a continual battle against the evil influences and temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. If we don't realize this battle, then we make ourselves vulnerable to losing our faith in Christ completely. Many people attach themselves to Christ's church, get their kids baptized and even confirmed, and they'll lead outwardly decent lives. But they won't abide in Christ's Word. They neglect to gather with Christ and his saints. So even though they were able to ward off the evil spirits of darkness for a little while, they are eventually overcome by seven spirits even worse than the first. Then they are worse off than those who never believed.

Jesus says that he casts out demons by the finger of God. The finger of God is the Spirit of God. You can't confess Christ except by the Holy Spirit. This means that when you have Christ and his gospel, then you can be confident that you have his Spirit as well. It was by his Spirit that he was conceived in the Virgin's womb. It was by his Spirit that he faced the devil's temptations. It was by his Spirit that he offered his life up to God as a spotless offering to reconcile you to God. And it is by that same Spirit that he blesses you with faith to trust in him for your salvation. So when you are confessing Christ and his Word, you don't need to wonder what kind of spirit is influencing you. You can be certain that this is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the living God. You will not be put to shame, because all who take refuge in him are blessed.

The Virgin Mary was more blessed than anyone. Elizabeth rightly said, “blessed are you among women.” That woman in the crowd therefore wasn’t wrong when she cried out to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you.” Mary herself rightly declared, “all generations will call me blessed.” And yet, Mary’s blessing didn’t come from her own virtue. It came from the Word that she heard and believed. It is as Elizabeth also said, “blessed is she that believed that there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” This is why Mary was blessed. She believed in God’s Word. When the shepherds came to tell her what they had heard from the angels – a message of peace and good will toward men – Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. In other words, Mary heard the Word of God and kept it. She believed it. She trusted it. She found in it her salvation from sin, death, and hell.

Jesus therefore responded to the woman in the crowd, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” Blessed are those who hear God’s Word, believe it, and confess it in their daily lives. Though the world despises this Word, blessed are you who hold onto it for your very life! Blessed are you who find in Christ’s death your salvation from sin and wrath. Blessed are you who, in your struggle against a guilty conscience, take refuge in the healing Word of sins forgiven and peace with God. Let us pray:

To God I raise my crying  
Before the Mercy-Seat,  
And on His Word relying  
His grace I now entreat,  
That He for Jesus’ sake  
Would cleanse my soul and spirit  
Through Jesus’ blood and merit,  
And Satan’s power break.

God, let not love of sinning  
Thy fear drive from my breast,  
Lest Satan, triumph winning,  
Be of my heart possessed;  
O let Thy chas’ning rod  
Each day give me direction,  
To seek Thy sure protection  
And tell Thy grace abroad.

My heart shall hold Thee solely,  
My Savior and my God!  
Come, Jesus, take it wholly,  
And make it Thine abode!  
Mold it to Thy control,  
That I, Thy Word receiving,  
May find, in Thee believing,  
Salvation for my soul. Amen.