



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

HOLY POWER, HOLY LOVE

By Fr. David C. Robinson, S.J.

An Excerpt from Today's First Reading

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.”

LUKE 11:14-19

Reflection

At first glance, today's readings seem to focus on the thunderclouds of divine judgment and the threat of demonic forces at work in the world. However, upon deeper inspection, there are more profound matters at hand. Joel's prophetic call certainly contains a great deal of fire-and-brimstone anger against the infidelities of the people of Israel. However, his focus also points to the abiding presence of God's merciful and generous heart as he speaks the words of divine promise: **"Rend your heart and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness..." (2:13).** What follows is a trumpeting declaration of future blessings and conquest as the chosen people of God. Joel's ire is more exhortation than condemnation, as he points the way to true fulfillment in the future.

The 11th chapter of Luke's gospel is a strange collection of firm teaching and woeful condemnations. It begins with the inspired teaching of the Lord's Prayer to the disciples, imbuing them with spiritual wisdom on their walk with God. What follows is a contentious back-and-forth of accusations and responses, ending with a scathing set of 'woes' pronounced by Jesus against the Pharisees and experts in the Law for their rigidity and sterile formalism as leaders of the Jewish community of faith. As the chapter opens with the humble piety of prayer before God, it closes with a righteous condemnation of practices performed for vain or legalistic reasons. The reader is left with a striking contrast in discerning what it means to be a 'person of faith' and a 'servant of God' in community.

Religion in our 21st century context faces many of the same conflicts of focus. How do we follow God's covenant of love, with its compelling mandates of mercy and compassion? When we fall short, how do we experience the 'judgment' that follows upon our vanity or arrogance? Is what we profess before God and our fellow-travelers mirrored in our daily thoughts, words, and actions? These are questions we must address head-on in our hearts and souls as we walk our path toward union with the God who is our source and our salvation. We do not journey under threat—God's mercy is our light and our roadmap. Our calling is to recognize with humble gratitude the enormity of the love that beckons and transforms. Our surrender to such love is not a ransom from our fallible decisions and actions. It is a mystical discovery of the grace and greatness that is our life with, and in, God.



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For Pondering

- What does it mean to you to say, "I know God loves me?" How would you explain it?
- When you fall along the way, how do you present yourself to God in prayer?
- Has your path of spiritual formation through the years inclined you more to love/transformation or fear/guilt in your journey of faith toward God?

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