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20th after Pentecost 6th of Luke

*'I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'* Thus the Creed begins. God, it affirms, is Creator of all things visible and invisible. There are empirical things; things visible, observable, all that may be counted, listed, measured, analysed, categorised: all that may be studied in our science. We call this the *physical* world, everything that *exists*, that is atomic at a fundamental level.

In the ancient and mediaeval worlds the gaps in knowledge could be soon be filled. Where, on the old maps, the cartographers could only show *Terra Incognita*, the imagination might soon supply: *Here be dragons!* The fantastic creatures of the mediaeval bestiaries, the gryphons and hippogryphs, the unicorns and the basilisks, the dragons and phoenixes, might soon be destined to vaporise, to settle down into the literature of fantasy but as the world was explored and the empty spaces on the map were filled in, those *things visible* would become even more astounding. Truly, God is glorified in His visible creation. As the Vespereal Psalm, 103 proclaims: *'O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all.'*

But what of *all things invisible*, the other side of God's creation? Just as Horatio is told by Shakespeare's Hamlet, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in his philosophy, so it is a point of Church doctrine, teaching and belief, that there is a spiritual creation. Indeed, without it, the physical would have no *being* at all for the things that exist and are seen are the symbols and manifestations of the spiritual realities that underlie them. As St Paul teaches us in the letter to the Hebrews: *'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.'* (Heb.11:1-3)

Man, even fallen mankind, has perhaps always been aware of this, noting those liminal places and times when the veil between the

visible and invisible grow very thin. But St Basil describes in his Anaphora, that God, in His righteous judgment, expelled mankind from paradise into this world, returning him to the earth from which he was taken. But this fall was from the deception of the devil. For the roots of the rebellion are of cosmic proportions and Sin has its origins in the spiritual, invisible world. So if the physical creation has become estranged from God, the source of life and so death entered the world, it must be a reflection of, the ripples left over, from a darker disobedience.

Yes, there are angels of light, ranks of the bodiless powers on high among the invisible creations of God. But there are also those who have fallen away: the demons, those who are on the other side to God, the contrast, the negative, the darkness of non-being and death, against which the goodness of the Light is clearly known. Yes, it is indeed a scandal that there is evil in God's creation but how else would we describe the Light if it were not against the darkness.

And these two sides of God's creation, the visible and the invisible, are not separate worlds, different creations. They are as entwined as the form of your face and the person you are, recognised by others. But what happens when the demonic encounters the very Lord of the Light Himself? St Luke today furnishes us with the results in today's gospel.

There are peoples and cultures that will assign *all* madness or nervous illnesses to demonic attacks and influence. Conversely, the modern mind will readily consign *all* reference to the casting out of demons in the Gospels to instances of recognisable mental disorder, requiring pharmacology. They are both wrong. There are indeed corporal and mental diseases and often the line between them is very vague but there are also the assaults and oppressions of the demons and, although so called 'possession' in individuals is not common, the demonic may clearly be found dispersed throughout in the structures of families, of communities, societies and nations. And the demons are there, as well, in industry and education, in politics and finance, in entertainments and technology. Think of the strange alliance between mental dysfunction and the demonic rampant in the contemporary aberration of so-called *transgender politics* or what

has so recently been uncovered of what has always been there, in Hollywood. Clearly, they are *legion!*

There are, perhaps, certain risks involved in taking the demons as the subject of the homily but we have already heard Matthew's version of this story earlier in the year: as the Church, we take this very seriously. When you climb some tall structure to a great height, the thrill is in looking down, out into the emptiness where you might fall. Yet for most of us it is best that we do not pry too closely into these matters of the demonic.

During the North Africa Campaign in the Second World War, the British general, Montgomery, used to keep on his desk a photograph of his German opponent, Rommel. He liked to study his face when planning his next move, as he felt it brought him closer to the mind, to know something of the inner workings of his enemy. We do not do that with the demonic; it is best left to expert exorcists and true spiritual fathers. It is a rule in the painting of icons that if the demons are depicted, that they should be shown only in profile: we do not gaze directly into the face of evil.

Although, thanks be to God, we are not involved in such a gospel, level of disturbance and oppression from the demons as that man in the Orthodox Christian spirituality does direct us to be aware, to be vigilant and on our guard. They are not within us, for we have been baptized but we can see them sideways, on the side lines, that liminal realm where the visible and the invisible meet.

As St Peter exhorts us, *'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.'* (1 Pet.5:8-9)

And that is the point, for our confidence, our faith is founded on the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness - not only in His earthly ministry, where the signs of the coming kingdom shook the demons with fear and seeking refuge in a heard of pigs, caused such panic that even here they had no place to hide from the light.

I perform exorcisms regularly here in this place, of course, there, in the narthex. Every time someone is brought to baptism they have

the four exorcism prayers read over them and the devil is renounced. It even says in the second prayer: *'...by the power of Jesus Christ, who hath all authority in heaven and on earth, who said to the deaf and dumb demon, "Come out from the man and enter no longer into him": Depart! Recognise your vain power which did not have authority even over swine. Remember him who commands you at your request to enter into the herd of swine. Fear God...'*

Remember this: that we or our sponsors on our behalf if we were too young, renounced Satan; we spat upon him and we turned to Christ. In baptism we were joined to the light and became children of the light. But whilst we are here our struggle, aided by God's grace, is to remain so until the end. That renunciation and that turning to Christ is to be our perpetual occupation and concern in this life. If Christ began the clearing out of the demons in His earthly life, then by his death and resurrection, death itself has been destroyed and the victory that is yet to come is already among us. As the homily of St John Chrysostom, read at the vigil of Pascha proclaims, *'Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns.'* No wonder the devil is depicted in the Book of the Apocalypse as, *'having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.'* (Apoc.12:12)

As for our children, we cannot hide them away from the world, whether visible to invisible, no more than we can hide ourselves. But we can teach them, especially by our example. I will, for example, refer you to a notice on our Facebook page regarding Halloween which, in my childhood, was just a customary bit of fun, the innocuous remains of the old Celtic paganism and its remembrance of the dead alongside the western Christian commemoration of All Saints and All Souls. But ever since the late nineteen-seventies, Hollywood began to blend it with the horror genre to the point where it has become something more sinister and with which we have nothing in common.

So our struggle continues, our renunciation of the devil. But none of us, enlisted as soldiers, warriors of Christ, need be afraid of the fight. In all our temptations, when we stand in the moment, let us be aware, let us glance sideways and if we perceive the dark forces, let us also be assured that our guardian angel is with us as well and

that nothing in this world, seen or unseen, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.