

III Lent 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Ephesians 5.1-14 St. Luke 11.14-28



William Golding's classic 1954 novel ***Lord of the Flies*** is about a group of British school boys who are the only survivors of a plane crash that leaves them stranded on an isolated and uninhabited island. Without any adults to guide them, the boys are forced to create their own society.

While the boys' initial attempts to govern themselves are successful, conflicts among several boys for leadership rapidly leads to a breakdown of order. There is tragic descent into violence and murder. The boys are a "society divided" into warring factions. Redemption comes only after they are rescued by a naval officer.

In the Gospel, Jesus heals a man who had a demon that kept him from talking. When the man began to talk...some people accused Jesus of having healed the man by the power of Beelzebub...the prince of demons. Beelzebub is a name derived from a Philistine god and literally means "Lord of the Flies".

Jesus counters the charge he is an agent for Satan by saying a country that divides itself into warring factions will not last very long. Neither will a family whose members are constantly at odds with each other. Satan would never fight against himself. He has no interest in making people well. He likes seeing them suffer. Jesus then tells the people he drives out demons and heals people by God's power. His healing miracles are all the proof they need God's Kingdom is already present.

The two stories which follow are really about spiritual warfare and keeping our spiritual lives in order. The man in the first story has all his weapons ready, his house guarded, and his belongings safe. He doesn't want a stronger enemy to attack him and "divide up" all his possessions. We keep ourselves spiritually "armed" by not becoming lax in prayer especially during Lent. The devil is looking for the moment we let our guard down to try to trick us. Our spiritual lives would then get "divided" and become spoils of war. We pray God will send his Holy Spirit to help us keep our spiritual lives safe.

What about the story about the return of the evil spirit? In the story, a man has an evil spirit driven out. The evil spirit gets bored wandering around looking for another vulnerable person. When he can't find one, he takes seven spirits more evil than himself and goes back to his original house. That man is worse off than he was before...because he has become complacent and let his guard down.

Our Lenten journey to the cross is about reflection, repentance and renewal. But once we have been freed from whatever baggage has been weighing us down...once we think we have it made and can relax on our way to Easter...we are leaving ourselves open to the Devil's tricks. We are at our most vulnerable when we think we don't have to do anything more to keep ourselves spiritually safe and secure.

The lesson we should take away from the stories about the strong man having his weapons ready and the man who lets his guard down and ends up worse than when he started cleaning his spiritual house, is that once we get rid of the bad things that distract us...we must replace them with good things that refresh us and build us up...and keep us safe from the Devil...that old trickster who likes messing around with our minds...especially during Lent.

Our friend, Saint Paul, gives us some advice on how we can keep our spiritual house in order and keep it from becoming a "house divided". He calls us God's dear children and then tells us to live in the Light...literally. We are called to live our lives out in the open and in the light. People often behave badly in the darkness of night because they think they won't get caught. But self-destructive behaviors are not limited to night.

God sees into our hearts and knows us better than we know ourselves. It's better to be honest and open with God and others. The way for us to walk as God's dear children is to avoid doing the things that can hurt us and those around us. It's often been said actions speak louder than words. How we act, in our personal lives, and toward others, speaks very loudly.

We are called to follow Jesus, the Light of the World, and live as God's dear children who experience his unconditional love. We are called to embrace a culture of life. Let's live in the Light of Christ now, and always!

