



to baptizing Him in the Jordan river, **“Let it be so for now for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15)**. Then right after Jesus gets baptized, He goes out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for forty days. Whereas in our Baptisms, God takes us out of the wilderness, as it were, and brings us into His household. That's the marvelous, directionally opposite nature of Jesus' Baptism and ours. Jesus is cast out; we are brought in.

To be sure, even though our Baptism delivers us from the wilderness of sin, it doesn't mean we are safe from the enemy. No, as St. Peter writes in his first epistle: **“Our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:8-9)**.

The devil is real and still persists to strip faith as it is sown into our ears and hearts through the Word. It's why I tell parents in pre-Baptism meetings that Baptism, while a glorious gift of God, puts a target on the backs of the baptized. The devil cannot create evil; he can only seek to destroy what is good. The devil hates when children are baptized. He hates that God wins. He wants to tear away faith so the blessings of the baptism are not received. So, when a child is baptized, he tempts the parents not to bring the kid to church so that he or she won't grow in their faith. In time, the fire of faith is snuffed out. He tempts the parents to believe, “Well, you got the kid baptized, that's all you need to do, now enjoy the Sunday off.” Sundays turn into “sun” years. Or he tempts the parents to believe, “Your kids aren't going to get anything out of church, and they can't sit in the pews for an hour anyways, and since you're going to be spending the whole time trying to discipline them, you won't get anything out of it either. So stay home. No harm, no foul.”

For the one who doesn't have children in the pews, the devil comes at you from this angle: he tries to get you to despise those children and their parents. “Oh, can't you just get your kids to behave? Take them to the cry room. They're making too much noise. They are disrupting *my* worship.”

Here's how he comes at pastors: “There's nothing you can do sitting up front. So, scorn your wife for not doing more in the pews. Your kids need to be perfect in church or everyone is going to think you're a bad parent.” Oh, the devil is brilliant. Let us say in united voice, “Go to hell, Satan, where you belong! Stop accusing us. Leave us alone, we are baptized children of Christ!”

Let me read that verse from **1 Peter 5:8-9** again. We all tend to focus on the first part, but listen to the second half especially: **“our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”** When we are experiencing temptation, the devil wants us to feel isolated. He wants all the parents to feel like they are the *only* ones with misbehaving kids in the pews. He wants all the kids to feel like everyone in the church judges *only* them with scorn when they misbehave. He wants all the pastors and vicars to think that everyone is going to despise *only* their families if they don't meet their standards or expectations. But Peter in the wisdom granted him by inspiration of the Holy Spirit teaches us that your suffering, our suffering, is the same suffering as the rest of the brotherhood of faith throughout the world.

You're not the only one. You're not isolated. Peter's comparison of the devil to a roaring lion is not just intended to compare their strengths or the fear that comes with their roar. Lions, like all predators, hunt the same way. They stalk. They look for weakness. And when they attack they seek to isolate the prey from the rest of the flock.

What has bee Satan's greatest weapon these past two years? “Don't go to church. You might get sick and die.” Or, oh, and this one is even worse: “Don't go to church, because you might get someone else sick, and *they* might die.” The devil knows God's Word, too. He knows how to turn “love your neighbor as yourself” against what God says everywhere else in Scripture. Do not get me wrong here. We must love our neighbor as ourselves, but not at the expense of the other commandments, and vice versa.

Don't let yourself be isolated from the flock. You're playing into the hand of the roaring lion. And to convince yourself otherwise is accepting defeat. The devils wins then. Instead keep returning to He who said to His only-begotten, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17)**. For when the Father speaks these words to the Son, it is not only a command for us to listen to the entire counsel of the Word made flesh, but also a promise that since Christ was baptized for our sin, we are made His children. We are brought into God's family. So trust that promise. Rejoice that you are not alone especially when you are suffering and feeling

the pangs of isolation. It is a lie of the devil. Christ never stops caring. Your church never stops caring. Your pastor never stops caring. If you are tempted to believe otherwise, resist it, firm in your faith. And tell the devil to go where he belongs. If you give in to the temptation by isolating yourself thinking no one cares, repent, and come back to the flock. Here, God makes His sheep to lie down in green pastures. Here, He leads them besides still waters. Here, He restores our soul (**Ps 23:2-3**). For here God continues to pour out His grace in the forgiveness of sins through the Word and the Sacrament. As Paul writes in our Epistle, **“He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:3)**. He is the source of your earthly life and eternal life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.