

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. I Peter 5:8-9 NIV*

Last week my wife and I were preparing the confirmation class, by previewing the 2003 Luther movie, which we will be showing them. One of the things that the movie got right was Luther's fierce belief in the devil, and his loud arguments with the devil. It seems that one of the main places that Luther argued with the devil was when the devil tried to make him doubt his faith or God's care for him.

This is consistent with scripture as well. The very first temptation that the devil goes to Jesus with is doubt that he is the Son of God. To the first temptation Jesus counters it by replying that also live and gain sustenance from God's word.

That is true, because if we go to God's word, we find at the end of the day God's love, God's hope and God's triumph over all. Paul says in his letter to the church at Rome, "if God is for us, who can be against us?"(Romans 8:31).

There is much in our lives that can drive us to doubt and despair. Sometimes it hits us all at once, and we suddenly feel like we're drowning in the ocean. At other times despair and doubt is really sneaky, and a lot of small issues can send us over the edge.

So we might say this is indeed ideal territory for the devil. St. Peter in the text I quoted pulls no punches on the devil's doings in this world. Can we heed his warning and advice?

This is not escaping our responsibility, as the late comedian Flip Wilson used to say "the devil made me do it". It is the devil using what is there in our lives already, magnifying it, and trying to get us to think there is no way out.

It is said that Luther's most potent retort to the devil was "I am baptized, I am baptized ! It was a good response, because in baptism we are "reborn children of God, and inheritors of eternal life"(Lutheran Book of Worship, p.121). We belong to God. The devil can try to bring us to doubt and despair, but our status as God's children is the true condition of our lives.

Where are you in your life right now? Do things seem to be getting difficult and hopeless? You might be getting some "unwanted help" from the devil pushing you in that direction. If that is the case, you as God's beloved children can tell him where to go.

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