

If someone asked you, "Who is your absolute worst enemy?" Whom would you say? Now that Osama bin Laden is dead we Americans don't really have a clear-cut, tangible enemy. I'm sure that some would say the terrorists who continue to threaten our country. That would be a valid response, but thankfully we haven't faced any attacks on our land from them in over ten years. Some might be thinking even more personally and mention a nasty business rival, or maybe someone who is a threat to their family.

But right now, we Americans don't really have one person or one country that we can really call our enemy. We don't live in constant fear and danger like people in Israel and Palestine. We don't fear Canada like the people of South Korea fear North Korea, or like the people of India and Pakistan fear each other.

But you know what, we do have an enemy, an enemy much worse than any human being or nation or religion. And right now we are on the battlefield with this enemy. There are no boundaries; there are no designated safe zones. This enemy wants more than just our lives, he wants our souls. The apostle Peter identifies him, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." But in today's Second Lesson Paul reassures the Romans and us that God has conquered the devil. God is on our side. We can look the devil in the eye and shake our fists at him because Satan cannot harm us.

The man who wrote the hymn we'll be singing during communion, "Jesus Priceless Treasure," expressed that wonderful truth in stanza 3 of his hymn. Based on the words of St. Paul to the Romans, we can look at the devil and shout with the hymn writer: Satan, I Defy Thee. And we can also say: You cannot accuse me with Christ. You cannot separate me from Christ.

This was a message that Paul needed the Romans to hear. You see, there were a lot of different kinds of people in this congregation. Since they were so different they faced a multitude of different challenges. Paul wanted to give them words of encouragement. And so he wrote this letter, a letter inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote chapter eight of his letter to the Romans to give them confidence. Christ has conquered death and he has also conquered Satan.

The believers in Rome came from different backgrounds. Some had come from pagan religions. Satan reminded these new Christians of their previous lives. He didn't want them to forget all the sins of their past because he planned to use their guilt against them. "Who do you think you are? You think God's going to forget about all those terrible things you did? You think you're ever going to be good enough to get into that God's heaven?"

Paul wrote, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" and, "Who is he that condemns?" Satan was the one trying to accuse those new Christians in Rome. That was one of his attacks against them. And his attacks weren't just aimed at them; they were aimed at the Jewish Christians in Rome too.

For so long the Jews had grown up on the "good works" religion. You obeyed the law and then you got into heaven. Satan knew this, so he attacked them. "Come on, you know this whole Jesus thing is too good to be true. Think about what Moses wrote in the Law. Think about what your fathers have been doing for centuries. Remember all those times the Israelites didn't keep the law? God punished them so badly! You have to keep the law or God is going to do the same thing to you!" Satan knew all about these believers in Rome, and he knew how to attack them.

And Satan knows the believers who attend Christ the Lord in Brookfield, WI. He knows all about your pasts; he keeps careful tabs on all the things you do, and on all the things you say. And he is pretty good at guessing your thoughts too.

Whether you're a new Christian or you've been one your whole life, you aren't immune from Satan's attacks. You know full well that you are far from perfect. You know God's law. You know that just thinking one dirty thought is enough for God to punish you for eternity. And Satan knows how often you've broken all of God's commandments. He takes your knowledge of the law and uses it against you. He attacks your conscience and accuses you of all the terrible things you have done.

But with Christ, Satan can't accuse and make it stick. Let's look at Paul's words again: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" The answer Paul expects is no one—and certainly not Satan. Our eternal destiny doesn't lie in Satan's hands. Satan doesn't declare us innocent or guilty. Paul says it: It is God who justifies. Satan can mount all the evidence he wants, but God declares us guilty or innocent. And God has declared us innocent! Again Paul asks: "Who is he that condemns?" Certainly not Satan. He can't condemn because "Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. He died the death that we all deserve. And God the Father approved of Jesus' work by raising him from the grave. And even more than that, now Jesus is at God's right side. He is like our lawyer pleading our case for us. And the Father listens to his Son. Paul ties it up like this, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Since God made the ultimate sacrifice of his Son for us, he will give us life with him forever. He has promised us eternal life.

God's greatest victory came against Satan when Jesus rose from the dead. At that moment the devil knew his fate was sealed. All of Satan's work during Jesus' ministry was for nothing. We heard about how Satan tried desperately to tempt

Jesus in the Gospel for today. Right at the start of Jesus' ministry Satan was there trying to get him to fall. But Jesus prevailed. He defied Satan.

God knew all along that this would be the case. Just like God has sealed his believers in his name since before time began. That is how safe we are in Christ. From eternity our names have been written in the book of life. And because of all of this work that God has done for us we can confidently say, "Satan, I defy thee. You cannot accuse me with Christ."

When Osama bin Laden authorized his henchmen to fly two airplanes in to the World Trade Center, he knew he would never be able to make that kind of statement again; American security forces would never again allow terrorists to hijack airplanes. If Osama was going to defeat America, he needed to change his tactics. Satan does the same thing. Since Satan knows his accusations carry no weight against us, he tries other tactics. He uses everything in his arsenal to try to separate us from the love of Christ. Paul knew that this was the case. He had even experienced some of Satan's weapons first hand. Paul also knew that Satan would try his tricks on the Romans.

But Paul's confidence that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ was well founded. Paul described many of his hardships in his second letter to the Corinthians. For example in the first chapter Paul already recounts his trials, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." And in chapter 12 Paul says, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."

Read through that letter and Paul's missionary journeys recorded in Acts and you'll see why Paul can say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Paul understood what the Psalm writer was talking about when he wrote, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." Paul faced all of these things. Eventually he even died as a martyr for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. Paul knew what he was talking about when he encouraged the Romans and his encouragement is true for us too.

Satan has many ways of trying to separate us from Christ. We live in a world full of temptations that Satan thrusts before our eyes every day. All you have to do is turn on a TV and you see people mocking God's commands. We get made fun of for taking a stand against sin. Satan uses all of these things to try to get us away from Christ.

But Paul knows that Satan's attempts will not work on God's chosen people. Paul knows this because the battle wasn't left up to him or to any other human. God took up the battle for us. That is why we can say with Paul, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Paul goes on to list things that cannot separate us from the love of Christ, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Yes, it's true that we will face some troubles in this life. But God uses our troubles for our good. Just a few verses before this in Romans Paul writes, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This passage sets the theme for the words that we have been studying today. Even in all his troubles Paul knew that God was working it out for his good. We also know that God is working things out for our good. So many times when we are going through troubles we can't see the good. But God is still in control. He is still working for your benefit.

I mean just think of all the suffering that Jesus went through for us. Think of all the good that that did for us. Jesus' suffering paid for the sins of the entire world. Jesus has won the victory for us. He has made us more than conquerors over Satan. And soon Satan will be completely destroyed. Paul writes at the end of Romans, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." And so we can say with confidence, "Satan, I defy you. You cannot separate me from Christ."

We know the enemy. The devil wants all of us to suffer eternally with him. We know he will attack us. But God has won the victory for us. We don't have to fear Satan's attacks against us. Jesus holds us safely in his arms. No matter what comes our way we can still have peace within us. God is for us. So keep on saying with the hymn writer, "Satan, I defy thee!" Amen.