

Good Soldiers (Isa 35:4-7; Jas 1:17-27; Mr 7:31-37)

* Friends, last Sunday we were devoted to studying the threefold conquering of the seven deadly sins. We imagined ourselves as the Christian soldiers having been equipped with all kind of spiritual weaponry such as the helmet of salvation, belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith and sword of the Spirit. On top of that we were gifted with wisdom and with the Chief Commander, God of Hosts. But I am under the impression that while we were playing Christian soldiers marching as to war, the fallen world was preparing for marching too. The days of its preparation should be accomplished on October 31. Unlike Christian soldiers this world is fascinated with playing the night terror. Yesterday I saw vampires, greenish corpses, female demons and some other horrible creatures that are ready to go. I think you've noticed them too, probably somewhere on the shelves of the market places among other goods. I am sure soon we will bump into them on the streets or even at the doors of your houses. Now, to what extent do you think about that phenomenon, with small wonder or with deep concern?

* Before taking the next step in exploring our wonders and concerns, I invite you to pray. Dear Heavenly Father, give us, your chosen people, the right perceptions regarding the current events we come across today. And because we were called to wage war against the satanic world, we plead to you for wisdom and protection. For to you alone belong all glory and dominion, the only true God; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

* Friends, it is absolutely necessary to know the devil's weapons practiced against us. When we consider carefully the three Sunday texts for today the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes and ears on such things. Therefore, let's go for knowledge and understanding the serpentine means of enmity.

* First, we'll consider what (Isa 35:4-7) has in mind about the devil's weaponry. Our text speaks about three deadly things that help the devil to keep people in slavery; these are fear, blindness and deafness. Usually in such a state of being, the theologians apply there to the spiritual dead individuals, or not converted. Keeping people in the state of being fearful, blind, and deaf is one kind of satanic strategy. Significantly, the Messiah has already come and broken down the satanic bonds that had kept God's flock in prison, (Heb 2:14; Rev 12:10).

* Today we observe Isaiah's prophesy as it was fulfilled in us when we received the faith in Jesus Christ. After having been freed from slavery of sin and the devil we were enabled to recognize our Saviour in daily life, to understand the words of God and to fear less. These pleasures are exclusively based upon Christ's victory. For it is not possible for the human being to win the battle with satan and death, only the Son of God could do it. It was the foremost victory among all other victorious battles. In that battle Christ deprived our enemies from their power completely and freed his flock from a permanent state of slavery. All believers were adapted and welcomed in the community of all saints to live in peace with the Father and to wage the war against the three monsters: our sinful flesh, the devil and his agents, (Jas 4:4). According to this insight the good

Christ's soldiers are the peacemakers and the troublemakers simultaneously. They overcome satan's agents by love; they overcome the devil by keeping God's commandments; they overcome their own sinful flesh by the Holy Spirit. Don't be surprised, you can do it; I can do it, by virtue of Christ's victory, by his love, by his wisdom. Friends, we have to acknowledge that we may lose the battle because we are not perfect, but we must not lose the war! "*Let the person who has an ear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. 'To everyone who conquers I will give the privilege of eating from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God,'*" (Rev 2:7). Friends, the victory is not cheap, it is a bloody war; you must believe and work hard at it! Now we will switch from the subject of the battle and go forward looking for wisdom.

* The second reading from (James 1:17-27) seems to me to be the short track to wisdom. In (v.5) James says that all believers have the privilege to ask for wisdom and to receive it, (2Ti 2:7). James was the apostle, (Gal 1:19), and the leader of the mother church in Jerusalem.

His apostolic and leadership status indicates that he was the gifted teacher and the wise counselor. The First Council in Jerusalem, headed by James, came up with the document prescribing some rules for Christians who are Gentiles. The (Act 15:19,20) says, *we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.* In fact, some gentile Christians were very prevalent to do those things in spite of a fact that they were freed from worshipping the devil! Nowadays' Christians have divided into two groups, the actors and the practitioners; one group plays with the devil while the other fights against the devil. The truth is that none of us can be successful in his/her vocation as a soldier if there were no concern and willingness to get rid of all moral filth, idolatry and foolishness. Twice James says on this account; *do not deceive yourselves, my dear brothers.* James gives us wise advice how to be successful in the battle with satan; here it is, *to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world,* (Jas 1:27).

Those who listen to these words and practice them are like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, doesn't go without setting all things in order and then keeps in mind what he looks like.

* After making clear the second point we are now going to discuss the third one. This comes into view of a person after reading the Gospel from Mark (7:31-37), our Sunday text. It says that Jesus healed a handicapped man with a deaf-mute problem. Willing to heal that man, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears, touched his tongue, then looked up to heaven and said, *Be opened!* Immediately the man's ears were unstopped so he was no longer deaf, and his tongue was loosed so that he could speak plainly. When the people saw this former deaf-mute countryman was shouting in a deep voice, they were astonished and then, they glorified Jesus, saying, *He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.*

* Now for a moment we turn from the storytelling to the lingo-analysis. In (v.35) we find the idea of imprisoning. The Greek tend to say that the man's tongue was like a prisoner bounded by a string, Very interesting imagery, isn't it? The next imagery here is that the gesture of putting Jesus' fingers into the man's

ears is in itself a symbolical language that expresses an act of unclosing. In summary by means of such bilingual imagery, the man's healing of a physical disability can be seen as the result of demonic conquering. Significantly, by the act of healing, Jesus demonstrates his authority over physical death and the troublemaker, devil.

* In addition, we discovered even more hints from this text. First, we found that in the healing of the one man there were several others healed persons as well. Friends, I have a sense that people who brought the handicapped man to Jesus also were healed. They were healed from being spiritually mute and from spiritual blindness. In the course of the remarkable occurrences the men couldn't remain silent; they kept on talking and talking. Their tongues were untied and their ears were opened. They exclaimed, *He has done everything well*. They glorified Jesus in saying, *He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak*. By healing the deaf-mute man, Jesus disarmed the devil and freed people from the bondage of fear.

* As a proof of this I recall my spiritual healing in the past. In the beginning the Lord opened my ears to hear the words of life but my tongue still was restrained. For one year or so I met regularly with a friend to study the Bible. I remember we liked to read Ezekiel and some other prophets; we learned by heart the 10 Commandments and prayed to the Father. Once my classmate said, I think we are ready to go. He meant the preaching. Where do we go, I asked fearfully? Let's start from a hospital, he answered. But I failed. Later Jesus took the satanic bond from my tongue; afterwards, I couldn't be silent any more up to now. Thanks to the Lord he made me his servant to witness to many.

* Having been healed from being spiritually mute and blind, we were assigned to march as to war. Friends, the marching is good but it is not what God calls us to be like. Jesus took the devil's bonds from us so that we were not only the parade soldiers but the belligerent ones. Be wise, says the Spirit, fear God and keep his commandments, be strong, and do not fear, doing so we will never lose the war. Now, to what extent do you think about being the good soldier -- with small wonder or with deep concern?

Beloved, The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen