

From the Old Testament of the Day: **Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.”** [Exodus 8.19a]
From the Holy Gospel: **But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** [Luke 11.20]

Today’s weekly oasis for faith in the midst of the season of Lent is the Sunday called Oculi, which is the first word of the Introit for the Day, “My eyes” – “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord.” With these words, you are led to acknowledge your own faltering and fallen existence, and so, you too, speak this appeal for God's help.

Indeed, your prayers are always a call for God's help, even if it is the simple, and rare, occasion when you thank God for answered prayer or or His interference in your daily life with mercy, with grace, or with a miracle, or best of all, when He bestows on you the forgiveness of your sins.

At work here for you is God the Son, your Savior, also identified in Scripture as the Hand of God the Father. The Father's ever-

present Hand of is Christ, is at work to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Old Testament and four Gospels also speak of God, this time God the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father's ever-present Hand is Christ, working your forgiveness, so the Holy spirit also is building your faith as the ever-present finger of God.

I.

The Old Testament of the Day presents you with a mighty struggle between God and the Pharaoh in Egypt. God has Moses speak to his brother, Aaron, saying, “Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.” And immediately “there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt.” It is third of the plagues. Twice before, Pharaoh counters God's thrust by ordering his

magicians to produce the same thing. But, as the Scriptures record it, this time is different: The magicians try by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they cannot!

Previously, when God causes Moses' staff to turn the water of the Nile red, the magicians pull a sneaky magic act of turning red some water of their own. And in the second plague, when God sends a plague of frogs to climb out of the Nile and infest every thing, the magicians again, by slight of hand, bring up more frogs from their bags and their buckets, and say, "Look here!"

But, this time there was no way to catch a bunch of gnats in order to magically have them appear. Gnats are not cooperative, that way. The magicians fail, and so they have to report to the Pharaoh the sad news, saying, "This is the finger of Elohim, the general term for God." But Moses and the Israelites know better. This is a miracle, wrought by the

finger of Yahweh, the personal name of the only true and living God.

II.

In the Holy Gospel for this day, the question of the finger of God arises again. This time it is not a matter of God, through Aaron's rod, creating millions of tiny gnats. This time it is Jesus Himself, who is the hand of God, and who is directly at work for your spiritual welfare. And it is a demon that Jesus is casting out from a suffering sinner.

Some of His antagonists challenge our Lord by claiming that He does this miracle because He gets His power from the devil, nicknamed in the New Testament as "Beelzebul." Others, to test Him, propose that Jesus do another yet miracle upon their command.

Jesus rejects their charges. "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Once again you hear this phrase, "the finger of God."

As you saw in Old Testament today, pagan magicians credited what they cannot duplicate to the general realm of gods, saying, “this is the finger of God.” Indeed, it is the finger of the one, true God that causes that miracle of the gnats.

Now, in the New Testament, by the working of God the Holy Spirit, the Finger of God, that God the Son, our blessed Lord Jesus, the Hand of God, defeats the demons.

And, as Jesus teaches, if you are not actively working with Him, you are actually working against Him. And if you have not been drawn into the kingdom of God, the Holy Trinity, you are actually running, by your life, away from God's kingdom. There is no neutrality when it comes to the things of God!

III.

Today, on Oculi, the 3rd Sunday in Lent, I thank God for the revelation of God concerning the Blessed Holy Spirit, who works for me, for you, and for the

Kingdom of Christ! Of myself, I am on the wrong side of this supposed neutrality. My sins drive others away from God's kingdom, and my working with Jesus is seriously lacking, day by day.

This is true, not because I can find a sin here or there to confess. This is true because I am a sinner to the core. It is humbling but helpful to repeat the catechism's teaching that it is not that we are sinners because we sin; rather, the opposite is the truth: we sin because we are sinners. That is your condition, too, and only the finger of God can rescue you. And rescue He – the Holy Spirit – does. Using the means of God's grace, the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit becomes the finger of God for you, whereby you are caught from your failings and set upon the rock of ages through which you find daily forgiveness and eternal life. The Lord be praised, for the blessing and work of the finger of God!