



Thursday of the 3rd Week of Lent



Date: Thursday, March 27, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C

First Reading: Jeremiah 7:23–28

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1–2, 6–9 | **Response:** Psalm 95:8

Gospel Acclamation: Joel 2:12–13

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:14–23

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

There is a particular danger in knowing the truth too well. Familiarity can breed contempt, and hearing the voice of God too often without heeding it can turn a heart not to flesh, but to stone. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a people who have been given every opportunity to listen, every reason to respond, and yet they turn away. “They have not listened to me or paid heed; they have stiffened their necks” (Jer 7:26). The Psalm echoes the same warning: “Harden not your hearts” (Ps 95:8). And in the Gospel, Jesus confronts those so blinded by their resistance to him that they accuse him of colluding with the very evil he has come to destroy.

But notice something in this Gospel exchange. Jesus does not merely refute his opponents with reason. He reveals something more profound: a battle is underway. There are forces at work in the world—forces of division, forces of deception, forces that seek to capture and bind. And Jesus, the stronger one, has come to set the captives free. “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk 11:20). This is not an abstract theological claim; this is a declaration of war. The kingdom of darkness trembles because the kingdom of God is advancing.

There is no middle ground here. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Lk 11:23). This is one of the starkest claims Jesus makes, and it lands with weight. It means that neutrality is an illusion. To remain unmoved is already to drift away. To refuse to respond is already to harden one’s heart. This is the peril that Jeremiah saw, the peril that Jesus saw, and the peril that faces us today.

But here is the good news: hearts can change. Stiffened necks can bow. Even those furthest from the truth can be drawn back. And few saints understood this better than Saint Peter Faber.

Faber was, by nature, gentle and introspective, a man of deep interiority. But he lived in an age of great division, an age when the Church itself was being torn apart by those who, like the Pharisees in today's Gospel, could not see the hand of God at work in those who differed from them. In a time of violent religious disputes, Faber was sent not to conquer but to persuade, not to accuse but to convert. He saw that many of those who opposed the Church did so not out of malice, but because they had never truly encountered the love of Christ. And so, he did not harden his heart against them. He listened. He accompanied. He opened doors rather than closing them. And in doing so, he softened the hearts of others.

Faber understood what today's readings demand of us. It is not enough to have correct beliefs if our hearts remain rigid. It is not enough to oppose evil if we do so with clenched fists rather than open hands. The kingdom of God is built not by force, but by the Spirit, and those who would build it must themselves be free. To be liberated by Christ is to be liberated for Christ—to become men and women who, like Peter Faber, bring peace where there is discord, humility where there is pride, and love where there is indifference.

In our own time, we see the consequences of hardened hearts. We see it in the divisions within families, within communities, within nations. We see it in the way we cling to our own perspectives, unwilling to listen, unwilling to be moved. And we see it in the suffering of those who are cast aside—the poor, the marginalized, those whose cries for justice fall on deaf ears. The danger is not merely that we fail to help them; the danger is that we cease even to hear them. But if we harden our hearts to them, we harden our hearts to Christ.

Today, then, let us heed the warning of Jeremiah. Let us take up the invitation of the Psalm. Let us recognize in Jesus not only the one who casts out demons, but the one who calls us to choose. And as we stand at that threshold, let us ask ourselves:

- Where in my life am I resisting God's invitation to change? What am I afraid of losing if I let go of my own hardness of heart?

- How can I be more like Peter Faber in my relationships—seeking to understand rather than to conquer, to reconcile rather than to accuse?
- In this Lenten season, where am I being called to gather rather than to scatter, to build rather than to tear down?

The time for neutrality has passed. The kingdom of God is at hand. And Christ, the stronger one, stands before us. Let us not harden our hearts.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.