The Devil and One Word

God, as we believe, created the universe and everything in it. And, as we are also aware, he created them through words, for words, of course, are power. “Let it be done,” God proclaimed, and it was done. And everything he made was good.

Well, God was especially proud and loving of the man and woman he made, because he had breathed into them a part of himself, his spirit. But, not surprisingly, the devil was jealous and angry. So, one day when God was enjoying the man and woman, the devil casually happened to walk by. He sauntered up to God and asked him what he liked so much about these creatures. And when God opened his mouth to speak, the devil craftily put a bond upon his tongue so that he could not speak! God could not talk! And since God’s creative power was in his words, the devil had bound that power.

The devil laughed at God and quite had his way with the man and the woman. Well, after some eons went by, the devil came back to mock God – he couldn’t resist, such is his nature. He scoffed at the silent deity and taunted this helpless God. God responded to all this by holding up one finger.

“One!” asked the devil. “Are you trying to tell me that you want to say just one word? Is that it?”
Yes, God nodded, pleading with his soft eyes and urgent hands.

The confident devil thought to himself, “I don’t suppose that even God could do very much harm with one word. OK.” So, the devil removed the bond from God’s tongue.

And God spoke his one word, in a whisper. He spoke it for the man and the woman, and it brought them great joy. It was a word that gathered up all the love, forgiveness, and creativity God had been storing in his heart during the time of his silence.

The word he spoke was Jesus!

This story is, of course, impossible. The devil could not really bind God’s tongue. But the story reminds us of the importance of words. God spoke a word and created the universe. He spoke a word and created us human beings. But the original Word that God spoke was his Son. That is why we call Jesus Christ the Word of God.

The great Franciscan Theologian of the of the 1200s, Duns Scotus (1266-1308), believed that God intended from all eternity to become human in his Son no matter what. So even if we had not sinned in Adam and Eve, God wished to be one of us to show his infinite love for those he had made in his own image. I have always like Duns Scotus’ theory because it means that the Incarnation was not a rescue mission after the Fall from Paradise but rather an eternal desire that God had in his heart to share in our humanity so that we could share more intimately in his divinity. The Fall, which is detailed in the first reading today from the Book of
Genesis, made things more interesting and only magnified God’s love for us even though we betrayed him.

In today’s Gospel from Mark, we see this Jesus having to face the accusation from his Nazareth family that he was “out of his mind” and the accusation from the Jewish religious leaders known as the Scribes that he could heal people by driving out demons only because was in league with the devil himself – the “prince of demons.” Welcome to our royally messed up world, Jesus!

His relatives thought he was out of his mind because he had left the safety and security of Nazareth where he had a good job as a carpenter and had embarked on a preaching gig where he was putting himself in danger by taking on the powerful Jewish establishment. In this Gospel passage, Jesus first takes on the Scribes who were outraged that he was healing people on the sabbath and thus violating the law (in their opinion). He points out to them that he could not be in cahoots with Satan because then Satan would be fighting against himself – which is ridiculous. Jesus was the enemy of Satan, not his collaborator.

It is at the end of this defense of himself that Jesus accuses the Scribes of “an everlasting sin” – sometimes translated as “an unforgivable sin.” Jesus makes this accusation because he is ticked off that his political enemies said he had “an unclean spirit” – that is, he was a buddy of Satan. Christians have often been troubled by the idea of “an unforgivable sin.” But there really is no sin that cannot be forgiven if we are sorry for it. Otherwise God is not God because God is love and God
is mercy. Jesus’ enemies were guilty of hardness of heart in refusing to accept his goodness and they were not sorry for it.

There’s another interesting story about the devil that may illustrate what a truly unforgivable sin is. A priest noticed an unusually handsome man at church one Sunday who asked for confession after Mass. The guy went on and on with his sins which were so terrible that the priest’s hair stood on end. When he was finally finished, the priest said to the young man: “you must have lived a long time to have done all that.” He said to the priest: “I am Lucifer and I fell from heaven at the beginning of time.” Now Father was scared, but he managed to say: “Even so, if you say you are sorry and agree to repent, your sins will be forgiven.” The man paused and then laughed in the priest’s face and went away. The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the one we are not sorry for.

At the end of the Gospel today, Jesus is reminded that his family (who think he’s crazy), are still waiting to see him. He is told: “your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.” Jesus looks at the circle of his disciples who are with him and responds with these famous words: “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Yes, God spoke the Word from all eternity – the Word who became flesh. And the Word that is Jesus spoke a word that makes his followers of all time one family whether they are blood relatives or not. And he spoke a word that frees us from sin and death – from the grasp of Satan – by dying and rising for us. All the words Jesus says flows from the one Word.
From this Word, all our good words also flow – words of love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and peace. Words that hurt and condemn and accuse and judge are not from God the Word. They are from the Evil One who is eternally unrepentant. May we always be careful in our speech and utter only words that are in accord with the holy and eternal Word that came from the mouth of God – the Word that is the holy name “Jesus!”