

The expression, *thrown to the wolves*, does not need much of an explanation. A similar expression in our more modern times is to be *thrown under the bus*. That, too, is self-explanatory. The one we will consider today, which is similar to both of these, is, *thrown to the lions*. And, for our purposes, we will make this singular: *thrown to the lion*.

This is what the Holy Spirit does to Jesus. Our text here in Mark 1 uses the word *drove*. But in the Greek, the word is *throws*. After Jesus is baptized, "*the Spirit immediately,*" it says, "*throws Him out into the wilderness.*"

Sounds rather harsh, doesn't it? And yes, it is a violent word. Not gentle, and very immediate. The Spirit wastes no time in taking Jesus from the Jordan River and throwing Him into the place of temptation; that place where Satan is on the prowl as a roaring lion.

Now, don't feel sorry for Jesus here. This is why He came to us. Not to be pampered, but to suffer violence. He came to be tempted in the same way that we are tempted. Jesus was thrown out into the wilderness because into that same wilderness you and I have been thrown.

Oh, I know, where we live, work, and play does not look much like a wilderness. Maybe more now in winter, but soon, when everything becomes green, we will hardly see this as a wilderness.

That is exactly what Satan wants us to think. If you are in a wilderness, you will prepare yourself for it. You will take provisions with you. Otherwise, you know that you will not survive, and especially if there is a hungry lion out there looking for you.

The entire world is a wilderness because there is no place in this world where we can escape temptation. And yet, you were not actually in the wilderness until the day of your baptism. Just like with Jesus, after you were baptized you were thrown out into the wilderness, because the hungry lion did not start looking for you until you were baptized into Christ, becoming his enemy.

I hope you are listening and taking this to heart, because that is the last thing the devil wants for you. He wants you and me to think nothing of him, or to think of him as a cartoon character in a red suit holding a pitch fork.

But a Christian who refuses to take Satan seriously is done for. A Christian who fails to take the provisions he needs out into this wilderness will be unable to escape the roaring lion.

If this describes you in the past, repent and turn away from that deadly way of life. The Holy Spirit has brought you here today to expose you to the truth about your enemy, but also to provide for you what you need so that you will survive this wilderness into which you have been thrown.

Satan knows that you are here today. He can no longer prevent you from being here. And so, he now has, as his goal, one of two things. Either to make you self-confident so that you leave here today without taking into your week the weapons the Holy Spirit here gives you, thinking you

don't need them. Or to make you despair, so that you fail to take with you the weapons of the Spirit, thinking there is no hope for you, that you cannot survive this wilderness, and so why even bother trying.

The devil knows us better than we know ourselves. And so, he knows in which of these two ways to tempt us. Give him the respect he deserves, just as you would respect an actual lion. But do not be afraid of him. He wants you to be afraid. He wants you to believe that you cannot escape him. But he is a liar. Listen, instead, to the Scripture text before us. Listen to what Jesus did for you, and take it to heart. For then you will be well-armed against the devil.

Jesus was thrown out into the wilderness, not to show you how to defeat the lion. He was there to crush the lion's head for you. Jesus placed Himself in harms' way to keep you from being harmed. Every temptation that Satan threw at Jesus was a sharp tooth trying to bite down on Him. But every temptation Jesus overcame, breaking each and every tooth, leaving the roaring lion with all bark but no bite.

And then, at the cross, Jesus was swallowed by that toothless lion; He was swallowed up by death in your place. But with His resurrection, He finished off your enemies once and for all.

My friend, you have in Jesus the weapon you need. You have your baptism into His death and resurrection. You have the Sacrament of His body and blood. You have Jesus' words which is the sword of the Spirit. And you have the forgiveness of your sins.

The roaring lion knows that he cannot defeat you with his teeth. Yet, he can use his mouth to lie to you. He tempts you to sin, and then he tells you that either you do not need forgiveness, or that you are too sinful for God to forgive you.

These are both Satan's lies. You and I are sinners – wretched, miserable sinners. We have fallen into temptation every day of our life. We need God's forgiveness. We cannot live without it. And the Spirit has brought you here today where this forgiveness is given to you. Here, in the Divine Service, is Jesus' word of pardon for you. Here are His Sacraments for you. Here are His words which give life.

And every word you hear is for you. Whatever your sin, however rotten your past, God forgives you. There is no one here, not one of you, who is too awful to be shown mercy. Jesus' blood ran down the cross also for you. He was thrown to the lion, thrown to the wolves, thrown under the bus – however you want to say it. And you are safe, safe in Jesus.

Do not be foolish. Do not neglect Jesus' words and Sacraments. Do not take Satan lightly. You are no match for him. Stay with Jesus. Be faithful here where the Spirit provides you with what you need. You live in a wilderness. But it's a wilderness that Jesus knows well. And in Him you will survive. Amen.