

OCTOBER 10 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Scripture scholars are not firm about the timeline of the prophet Joel. In his prophecy, he does not speak to any king and warn him against making an alliance with the Egyptians or the Babylonians or the Syrians. He does not warn the king to stay away from idols and temples.

So, the scripture scholars think that, most likely, Joel proclaimed his message of the Lord in the post-exilic time, when they had come back from the exiles, in 538 BC. They had now settled down. They had begun—they were in a state, at the beginning, of total despair. Their temple had been destroyed. The synagogues and marketplaces had been destroyed. Their houses were in ruins.

So, they started building things up, and they even started growing crops. And this is the time when Joel speaks, not to kings, but to the priests and the governors because they were the ones responsible for the welfare and order in the community.

And what does he tell them? He says, "Sound the trumpet, sound the horns, call the people together." Now, whenever there was a flood, or there was a danger, or an enemy attacking, the priests would sound the horns. The horns were made out of the horn of a ram. Even till today, they make that sound—they use that horn. It's called a shofar. And they sound it to announce a time of danger, a time that people have to be alert.

And so, what did Joel tell them? He says, "Call a solemn assembly, sanctify a fast." If these words sound familiar to you, you shouldn't be surprised. If I'm not mistaken, you will hear it on Ash Wednesday. It is a call for the people to beware because what

had happened was a plague had come and destroyed a lot of the crops. And so, it was a time to sound the horn, to warn them of danger.

But that plague was a metaphor, as well; that, if the people who had now settled down and gone very casual about their way of life, were not going to keep the Torah and obey the Sabbath and have their children—male sons—circumcised and kept the traditions, then they would be overpowered once again by enemies who would take them once again into exile.

So, the metaphor of the plague that destroyed the crops was also a metaphor for the people to get their lives together. And then, Joel introduces a new thought, a day of the Lord. It is a phrase that is, you will find in the New Testament very often in the letter of St. Paul—in the letters of St. Paul. And also, Jesus speaks about being alert because you do not know the day or the hour when the Lord is coming.

This is the day of the Lord. But for the people at the time of Joel, it was a day of vindication. There were people in the exile who had been a faithful remnant. They were a group that remained faithful to the traditions of the Torah. They observed the Sabbath even in Babylon. They would not sing their songs in a foreign land. They would have their children brought up in the faith and reminded about the commandments.

For these people, the day of judgment was—the day of Lord was a day of hope, of joy, of salvation. But gradually, when the people began to sin and turn away from God, the day of the Lord would

be a day of judgment, a day to be dreaded, a day when the Lord would come and exact justice from everybody.

And it was a day that Paul will use when he speaks to the different churches, and they are flooded with people who are preaching heretical things. And the Lord—Paul would say to them, "Be on your guard against these people who will teach you false things and people who will lead you astray."

When we come to the Gospel, we have a different metaphor and a different picture altogether. Jesus has exorcised a demon. Now, today, when we speak about exorcism, we have a definite way of going about things. It has to be, um... permitted by the bishop, and the bishop must know everything that is going on, in the terms of who are the men, who are the ones capable, and who can do this.

But in the time of Jesus, holy men and women would exercise demons. And the demons—being possessed by the demons, did not actually mean possessed by Satan himself. But it could be everything, you know, from epilepsy, to seizures, and things that they didn't know how to handle, they called them possession by the demons. And Jesus comes out quite (Unclear).

So, it was not the question of whether you could cast out demons or not, but by whose authority would you cast out demons? Would it be by the Lord who brought freedom and healing? Or would it be by Satan, who would bring chaos, confusion, and division?

And the fact that the Lord is the creator of heaven and earth and has control over everything does not mean to say that we make bad choices, and therefore, evil comes around all of us. And therefore, we pray the beautiful prayer, "St. Michael the

Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil."

This is precisely what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and challenging us today. "Are you going to be on my side or are you going to be on the side of the devil?"

The world around us tells us that the only way to go about things is money, fame, and fortune. The way Jesus goes about is caring for the needy, for the abandoned, for the voiceless in our society. The choice is yours, or the choice is mine—and the choice is mine. What are you going to choose, for Jesus or for Satan?

Seems obvious, but we don't do the obvious very often.

God bless you all.