



22. March 2026

LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 33: “The demons try to prevent Jesus from being recognized”

Our Lenten journey has brought us today to what is known as the “First Sunday of Passion” and draws us ever closer to Holy Week. The confrontations and disputes between the hostile Jews and Jesus continue and grow increasingly aggressive (Jn 8:46–59). We can see that the Lord is faced with stubborn hearts that are simply unwilling to open themselves to the truth.

We had already noted that neither the miraculous healings, nor the resurrection of Lazarus, nor the wisdom that flowed from the Lord’s mouth had managed to convince the Jews. In this context, Jesus utters these words, in which His lament is perceptible: *“Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”* (vv. 46–47)

With these words, the Lord gives us the key to understanding why the hostile Jews were so obstinate: they do not come from God, nor are their thoughts, words, and actions guided by Him. That is why they close themselves off more and more the further Jesus leads them into the truth.

Let’s take a look at an explanation of today’s Gospel:

Jesus’ dispute with the Jews who had closed themselves off to His message reaches a first climax when they pick up stones to throw at Him. They do not understand—and probably do not want to understand—Jesus’ language. They do not realize that standing before them is the Son of God, who cannot be understood or judged by human standards, but must be listened to, His words taken to heart, His works observed, and from there, believed in by the grace of God. The Jews are particularly scandalized when Jesus attempts to reveal His divinity to them and make them see that He, the One sent by the eternal Father, existed before the creation of the world. He existed before Abraham was born; He has always existed.

The hardening of the heart, accompanied by the blindness of the mind, has serious consequences. Jesus’ enemies block their own path to recognizing the One who came among them to fulfill the promises of the Old Covenant. Had they believed in Him, they and their descendants would have been able to make their own the wonderful

profession of faith that expresses the true identity of Jesus and the reason why He came into the world, just as we Christians confess to this day in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: Jesus is „*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through Him all things were made...* ”.

The hostile Jews, on the other hand, by rejecting His divine origin, went so far as to claim that Jesus was possessed by a demon. In the Synoptic Gospels we find this same accusation when His adversaries claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul (Mt 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15). This is a satanic inversion of the truth that in Jesus God’s salvation is offered to us and that He bears witness to the Father’s love. In all He does and says, Jesus seeks the Father’s glory, yet He is rejected by those who, because of their position and their knowledge of the Scriptures, should have been the first to recognize Him. However, to recognize Him requires a true relationship with God. In the previous passages, Jesus had already made clear why the hostile Jews had closed themselves off from Him. In today’s passage, He expresses it very simply: they did not know God.

With the absurd accusation that Jesus “is possessed by a demon” (cf. v. 52), the hostile Jews not only show that their understanding had been clouded and that their hearts had given way to evil thoughts and feelings, but that they themselves were under the influence of demons, just as they claimed of the Son of God. After all, it was the “father of lies” who was blinding their eyes and deceiving them.

We must keep this dimension in mind when we seek to share the Gospel and bring Jesus to people, in whatever way we may. We will face not only ignorance or the allure of the spirit of the world or other ideologies, but also the influence of evil spirits, who seek to keep people captive in their errors. The Apostle Saint John clearly states in his first letter: *“Every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.”* (1 Jn 4:3)

Satanic influence manifests itself in a special way when someone denies, relativizes, or reinterprets the divine sonship of Jesus. That is why it is important that our efforts to bear witness to the Lord as the light of the world be supported by prayer against the spirits of evil, such as, for example, the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel.

Jesus’ dispute with the Jews reaches a sad climax today: *“So they took up stones to throw at him”* (v. 59). But His hour had not yet come. He did not allow Himself to be stoned, but hid Himself and left the Temple. His mission to proclaim the Gospel and heal

people was not yet finished. The light of the world was still among them, so that the blind might see.

As the fruit of today's meditation, let us strive, in addition to working for evangelization, to pray to weaken the influence of evil spirits over people.

Meditation on the Gospel of the day (Part I): <https://en.elijamission.net/the-gospel-of-st-john-jn-1040-42-111-16-signs-and-miracles/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day (Part II): <https://en.elijamission.net/i-am-te-resurrection-and-life/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day (Part III): <https://en.elijamission.net/the-gospel-of-st-john-jn-1128-46-the-raising-of-lazarus/>