

Third Mid-Week- Lord's Prayer and the Savior's Passion  
February 24, 2016  
St. Luke 22:31, 32  
Your Will Be Done  
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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

Would Satan seduce Peter and the others away from their faith in Christ as he had done with Judas? Satan is the church's adversary. Jesus addressed Simon by his old name rather than Peter to remind the apostle of his frailty. Simon was not the only one in danger, however. The "you" in Jesus' warning, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat," is plural. Satan wanted very much to trouble all the apostles. Perhaps in his view, Satan would expose them all as chaff that blows away when the harvesters sifted wheat. Either way, Jesus knew Satan's intent.

Jesus knew Satan would never give up his attacks against the church, against us. Our adversary seeks to sift us as wheat, to shake us back and forth violently by temptations. The gleaners did their shaking to cleanse the wheat. Satan does it to try and destroy our saving faith in Jesus as the Christ, our Savior from sin. Jesus included a Third Petition in the Lord's Prayer. By this petition we beseech God to intervene and to prevent the devil's destruction of our faith.

Jesus' intervention is what our Savior offered to his heavenly Father for Simon. The Lord repeats Simon's name to get his attention. "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat," Jesus told him, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail." Jesus addressed Simon individually within the hearing of the others in the upper room. The second "you" in singular. Our Perfect High Priest interceded for them all, but Simon needed it most. He needed to realize his impetuosity would get him in trouble. Simon needed to realize the curse of his pride and self-sufficiency.

It is with the awareness and admission of our sinful pride that we pray, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven." God's will is that we keep his name holy and let his kingdom come. The only way we do that is for God to keep us strong in his Word and in our faith as long as we live. In the Third Petition we call on God, therefore, to guard his Word among us, and guard our faith. We call on our Father to break and to defeat every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

If God does not keep us strong, Satan can lead us astray from God's Word. We would then live in error and unbelief. Without God's answer to our petition, the people and things around us of this world try to prevent his will being done by leading us to ignore, forget, or deny Jesus in our lives. The sinful flesh tries to prevent God's will from being done by promoting a hatred of God's Word and an enjoyment of sin. God must break and defeat all of those evil plans and purposes of those unholy three. God alone make us on earth like his angels in heaven, "mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word," as the psalmist writes in Psalm 103:20.

We cannot take good care of God's Word without the Spirit's power. We cannot obey God's will without the Spirit's power. It is God's grace alone that kept Simon in faith and led him to godly repentance after he later denied Jesus three times around the fire in the high priest's courtyard. Jesus did not pray that Simon not go through any of this temptation. Jesus prayed that God would give him the strength so that even as his heart and mouth denied knowing Jesus, Satan was not allowed to quench the fire of Peter's faith to put it out.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians an oft quoted passage, 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Satan attacked Jesus but failed because Jesus is the Sinless One. But against Jesus' disciples he may press the claim that we are sinners and that the wages of our sin is eternal separation from God. Satan was frantic in these last hours before Jesus fulfilled his redemption of the world. Still, the devil could not attack the disciples at will. He could test them only with God's permission within the boundaries God set, as also in the case of Job.

God has given this promise to the comfort of all us Christians. When we pray, "Your will be done," we ask God for the enduring strength of the power of his Word to keep us in saving faith. We may stumble and fall in weakness, but through the gospel, the means of grace, the Holy Spirit preserves us in faith. God allows Satan to test us daily not to take us to the brink, but to give us the chance to use the power of Christ in our lives. St. Peter wrote in his first epistle, "You through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time." [1:5] We hear this promise often in the Votum, peace, after the sermon in St. Paul promise to the Philippians, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." [4:7]

Jesus knew Satan would not crush his friend's heart. Jesus calls him Peter even as he describes Peter's denial. Jesus knew the Holy Spirit would work repentance in Peter's heart. And after that repentance, Jesus told him, "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Satan would sift them too as they all ran away from Jesus in Gethsemane. Since Peter had fallen most deeply and so experienced the fullest measure of divine grace, he would be the one to comfort the others. He did that with words like we just heard from his first letter.

We pray in the Third Petition for God's protection and deliverance from the schemes and threats of the devil, the world and our flesh that would hinder or prevent God's will among us; that we teach his Word in its purity, that all people believe in Jesus through that Word, and that we all live a holy life according to that Word. We pray because it is God alone who breaks and defeats those plans. It is God alone who strengthens us and keeps us firm in our faith.

How urgent it is then that we are in the Word. That we rely on the power of God's Word. That the comfort of his Word of forgiveness reassures us when we fail. How urgent that we prayer as Jesus has taught us, Our Father in heaven, let your saving plan be done rather than the plans of the unholy three. Amen. <SDG>