

Sixth Midweek Service-Passion and Prayer

March 16, 2016

St. Matthew 26:41

Lead us not into temptation

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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Temptation is something we all face. By recognizing temptation, we take the first step in avoiding falling into its trap. There is a big difference between experiencing temptation and falling into it. The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer is about the latter. We ask God to prevent us from falling into the traps of sin the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh set for us.

We speak about temptation in two ways. You have experienced those ways. God gives us temptations or tests so we can exercise our faith. These tests would be suffering, or loss. These temptations are not sinful since God gives them. St. Augustine once said, "By temptation comes our increase. For no man knows himself unless he is tempted. No man can be king unless he wins and no man wins unless he fights." James wrote, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." [1:2] Think of Job. Recall the times and circumstances God has used such things in your life to help you.

Jesus' disciples faced the other kind of temptation late Maundy Thursday night in Gethsemane. They were tired, stressed, fearful, and uncertain about the future. None of those things are sinful in themselves. However, these weaknesses of their bodies opened the door for sin. Jesus told them to be on the alert for that, to pray for God's strength. Their spirits were willing to remain strong but the weakness of their sinful flesh could mean their downfall. Those weaknesses led them later to desert the Lord in his time of need.

We confess here that God does not tempt us to sin. The temptations to sin against God by opposing his will, or cursing his name, or forsaking him in times of trouble do not come from him but from Satan, the world, or our flesh. It is for deliverance from giving into the temptation to sin that we pray in this petition.

James reminds us that temptations to sin whether those follow a cross God places on us, or are a direct challenge to disobey God's will come from sin in us. "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." [1:13]

Satan tempts us to false belief about God and about his working in our lives. This was the temptation he placed before Eve and continues to place before us. This was the temptation Satan placed before Christ in the wilderness that our Savior overcame.

Satan strives to lead us into despair. This is where Satan works after God allows us to suffer persecutions and tribulations in this life. This petition is not that God would spare us from those hardships. Jesus never prayed or told us to pray that God take us out of this world. The Sixth Petition is that God would prevent Satan from using these things to make us fall into the trap of sin.

There are situations that are sinful in themselves that lead us into great and shameful sins. Solomon mentioned some in Proverbs; lusting after a woman's beauty, being friends with those who do not want to walk in righteousness, drunkenness when wine goes down smoothly. The Apostle Paul adds "the love of money," and "many foolish and hurtful desires." [1 Timothy 6:10]

We know that we will never be able to escape all temptation to sin. This petition is our prayer that God would control the kinds and amount of temptation to sin that do come into our lives. He answers our prayers and does that. We might think God is not listening as certain temptations to sin attack us. But if God were not controlling them, they certainly would overcome us.

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus had experienced temptation to sin. He never considered it. He immediately rejected Satan's temptations. He was without sin. Our Savior understands what we have to go through. Our Lord has given us this prayer for our good. We are forgiven when we fall into temptation by Jesus' success in being without sin.

This petition reminds us that our battle is not against mere flesh and blood but against the powers of darkness and spiritual deception. In spite of what many believe today, Satan and evil do exist. To many people, Satan is nothing but a mythical figure. To many people, evil is merely the most vicious behavior of a few, and then there likely is some other explanation.

We know Satan and evil are real. Our spirits are willing but we know our sinful flesh is weak. So, we pray as our Savior has taught us, "Lead us not into temptation." I pray not only for myself. We pray for all Christians that our heavenly Father remove the Tempter from us. We pray that our Father in heaven not allow Satan to tempt us beyond what by the power of his grace we are able bear or overcome. We ask for God's grace and strength in the battles we must wage against the temptation to sin.

The Lord's Passion assures us of a positive answer to our request. Our Savior's death on the cross has ended Satan's power over us. His grace in bringing us to faith has given us the knowledge and strength to recognize and counter Satan's lies. Our Savior's cross enables us to crucify our sinful flesh and walk instead by the Spirit in righteousness and blessedness.

The Lord's Passion is the power of the Lord's Prayer. This petition like the others is the way we acknowledge and confess that by my own strength I am not able to resist any temptations. We overcome and gaining the victory is the work of God's grace alone. We have received new spiritual strength through our rebirth. Our Father in heaven, we know you do not tempt us to sin. Preserve and protect us by Christ from our enemies without and within who do. Amen. <SDG>