

## “And Lead Us Not Into Temptation.”

James 1:12-16

Throughout this Lenten Season, on our Wednesday services, we have focused our attention on the petition of the Lord’s Prayer – Thy will be done. Maundy Thursday is a day closely associated with prayer. Jesus prays with and for His disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus spends three hours in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Tonight, I want to turn our attention to the petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “And lead us not into temptation.” These words certainly require a little bit of clarification. At face value, it seems that God is the source of our temptation into sin.

But Scripture clearly and plainly states the truth that God tempts no one to do evil. Our evil desires are what drag us away from God. It is Satan who has been a liar, deceiver, and murderer from the beginning and he is the one who brings the temptation to sin into our lives.

James, the brother of our Lord wrote that it is when we conceive of evil desires that we give birth to sin. And it is our sin, when full-grown, that gives birth to death. This is why Christ had to come and pour out His blood and establish a new and better covenant.

God is not the source of any of the temptation, sin, or death of this world. Rather, He is our only source of freedom from temptation, sin, and death. That is the reason we are all here tonight.

It is like what we see in Luke's Gospel with the exchange between Peter and Jesus when He predicts Peter's denial. Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. . . I tell you Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

We know that like Simon Peter, Satan would like to "sift us as wheat." It was Satan's desire to destroy Peter's faith when Peter was pressured into denying the Lord. Christ prayed that he would be given the strength to overcome the desires of the devil. We all know what happened. Peter did fail to stand up and publically confess his faith in Christ, and for a while, he was in great despair. Jesus told him this would happen.

Jesus knew Satan's desire and how he would tempt Peter. Jesus knew that Peter would still deny Him. He tells Peter, "before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Yet He prays that Peter would be given the strength to overcome the desires of the devil.

Even though Peter gave in to temptation and denied Jesus, as Jesus knew he would, Satan's goal once again fell short, because Christ came to Peter after His resurrection, showed him the seriousness of his sin, and then forgave him, and welcomed him back as a disciple and as a friend.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knows Satan's desire and how he is going to tempt Jesus to not go through with the plan of salvation. Jesus knows that this cup of suffering cannot be taken away. He must endure it. Yet, He prays that if it is the Father's will and there is another way, "take this cup of suffering from Me – Yet not My will but Thy will be done."

God's will must be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. God's name must be hallowed. God will deliver you from evil. It is God who allows Satan to cause the evil of this world to occur, but this is not incompatible with the reality of a good and merciful, loving Father.

Imagine the alternative. Imagine if God were not in complete control. What if the world was governed by fate? as many people say it is. What if our lives were controlled by random chance? rather than by God's divine plan. Then we would have a reason to be frightened in this world. Who would know what evil was lurking around every corner?

But rather, we know that we have a loving, gracious, good, merciful Father in heaven who watches over us, defends us from the evil one, and gives us the strength to persevere in the faith. He is the One who gives you that strength that you do not have on your own.

When we pray, "And lead us not into temptation," we pray for several things. First, we pray that God would grant us the strength to resist and overcome the temptations to follow our sinful desires.

We know that the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature will continue to try to mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great sins. We pray that God would give us the wisdom and strength not to be misled away from our only source of salvation.

However, when we pray, "And lead us not into temptation," we do not ask God that all temptations and tests of our faith are ended. First of all, that would be impossible living in a world full of sin. And secondly, we would not want that to occur. If our faith was never put to the test, it would be like a muscle that was never put to any test, it would become weak.

Scripture tells us to rejoice in the struggles of this life, because we need a strong, mature faith in order to withstand the onslaught of Satan. Every day of our lives, we run into people who use to come to church, or use to believe in God but fell away because of their weak faith when faced with trouble or difficulty or temptation.

Be strong in your convictions. Have no doubt in your mind that you are a forgiven child of God. And when faced with difficult times, remember that even Peter failed in his time of testing. But in the long run, it did strengthen His relationship with and faith in Jesus Christ. We do not read of Peter's faith again wavering after that day.

When you are faced with trials and temptations, do not run away from Christ and His Church as so many do. But call upon His Name in prayer, and come to His table in confidence that Christ our Lord will continue to intercede on your behalf and send His Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your faith. Amen.