

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday After Trinity, July 9, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 550, 458:7, 402, 524:1-5, 524: 6-7

Lessons: Genesis 39: 1-20a, James 1: 12-25, Matthew 26: 36-44.

Sermon Text: Matthew 6: 13a

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When Martin Luther explains the Sixth Petition in the Small Catechism, he assures us that *“God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory.”*

Today let us consider Jesus’ words

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

- 1. God surely tempts no one to sin.**
- 2. The devil, the world, and our flesh constantly tempt us.**
- 3. We pray that we may overcome and win the victory.**

As we begin today, we need to be assured of one thing: God is not going to lead you and me into temptation. James put it this way in our epistle lesson: *“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’* And then he explains why he said those words: *“For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.”* (James 1:13) So when we pray, *“And lead us not into temptation,”* we are not saying that God is ever going to lead us into temptation. He’s not going to do that. This is the God whom you and I are worshipping this morning, the God who loves us with an unfailing love, a God who wants what is best for us. This is a God who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ. He wants you and me to spend eternity with him in Heaven.

He does test our faith by allowing certain things to come into our lives. We are reminded of that “thorn in the flesh” from which Saint Paul suffered. Paul writes in Second Corinthians chapter 12 *“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.”* But God’s answer to St. Paul was, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12: 8-9) We really don’t know what this “thorn in the flesh” was, that St. Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away from him but it turned out to be a blessing to him, because through it, Paul’s faith was strengthened as he was forced to look more and more to God. Saint Paul ends up saying, *“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (2 Corinthians 12: 10)

This God whom we worship is certainly a God who will test our faith in order to increase our faith and trust in him, but he is not going to lead us into temptation to sin. James follows up by reminding us that, *“He chose to give us birth through the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.”* (James 1:18) By the washing of holy Baptism, God has claimed you and me. He’s claimed us as his children. He’s given us a new birth by that washing with the Holy Spirit, claiming us as his children by the faith that the Holy Ghost works through baptism and the Word of God. So, this God who has claimed us as his children, who wants what is best for us, certainly is not going to lead us into temptation.

In our Old Testament lesson you heard about Joseph who was severely tempted by Satan and those in the world. He faced troubles even from his own brothers, who sold him into slavery, and that’s how he ended up in Egypt. But do you remember his answer when tempted to commit adultery with the wife of his boss? His response

was not that of many who today are tempted to commit sexual immorality or, for that matter, any kind of immorality or sin. Joseph's answer was ***"How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"*** (Genesis 39:9 NIV) ***"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"*** (Genesis 39:9 KJV)

We will always have temptations facing us and attacking us as long as we draw breath here on earth. There is always the danger that one stands today and falls tomorrow. Therefore, even though we at this moment may stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray repeatedly that he would not permit us to relapse and yield to trials and temptations.

But we need to have our faith tested. When things are going smoothly in our lives it is easy to say, "I trust in the Lord and am sure of his love for me." But when trials come and we still have the spiritual strength to say "I trust in the Lord and am sure that he is dealing with me in love," we have stood the test and are happy because we have done so with the help of God. God tells us ***"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance"*** (James 1:2-3). ***"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him"*** (James 1:12).

The temptation into which we ask our Father not to lead us is the temptation to sin. The very holiness of our Father in heaven prevents the possibility that he would ever tempt us to sin.

Temptation comes at us from three different sources: the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. We ask our Father to lead us and guide us in such a way – every day – that their temptations may not overcome us. We have his assurance that he will do that: ***"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."*** (1 Corinthians 10:13) Even the anti-drug slogan used in the past "Just Say No" is one of those ways that God provides a way out.

He has provided us with "full armor" for overcoming temptation: truth, righteousness, readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God. Using it and having done everything in the process ***"you may be able to stand your ground"*** as we read in Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6. (Ephesians 6:11–17). But having the weapons, we also need the skill and the strength to use them. Since only our heavenly Father by his Holy Spirit can supply our need, we are to keep on praying while we put on and use God's armor. Jesus tells us in our gospel lesson: ***"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation"*** (Matthew 26:41). In this petition in this prayer he has even taught us which words to use when we pray: "Lead us not into temptation."

Whenever we pray the Sixth Petition we are alerted to the fact that we are going to be attacked by temptations. The ***"devil's schemes"*** (Ephesians 6:11) are clever. He will try to exploit any sign of weakness on our part to the utmost: things such as covetousness, vanity, vengefulness, discontent, laziness. The world's propaganda to ignore God's will is insidious: We hear such temptations as "Times have changed and you have to keep up with the times." "Nobody believes that you have to obey God anymore." "Everybody's doing it." "The Bible and its ideas are old-fashioned." "Nobody thinks that way anymore." "Have fun!" But Scripture is full of passages showing in which direction our sinful flesh wants to go. No one is immune to temptation, but the Christian knows better and shall never cease to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." "Forewarned is forearmed" is the proverb of the world which warns us.

To feel temptation is a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it. We Christians must be armed and daily expect to be attacked unceasingly. When we expect that, we dare not go on in security and heedlessly, as though the devil were far from us, but at all times expect his blows and fight them off. Scripture warns ***"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"*** (1 Corinthians 10:12 NIV) For in the very moment I think I am standing firm, Satan attacks me. For he is an enemy that never rests nor becomes tired, so that when one temptation ceases, there always arise other temptations and fresh temptations.

Jesus teaches us to pray in the first person plural: "We" and "us". None of us wants our brothers and sisters in our Father's family to be overcome by temptation. Then we on our part dare not put temptation in their path. Saint Paul was ready to present himself to believers as a model of Christian living. ***"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."*** (Philippians 3:17)

But he was also aware of the damage which would result if he were to set a bad example: ***“We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.”*** (2 Corinthians 6:3)

That warning against causing offense, against causing anyone to stumble into sin by our words or actions is for all Christians, as Saint Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33: ***“Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”***

Luther’s explanation in the Small Catechism includes these words: *We pray that we may overcome and win the victory.* We are praying to our Father in heaven, who holds all power in his hand, as we are reminded in the doxology of the Lord’s Prayer. With him on our side we shall finally overcome and obtain the victory. But we must be immersed in him. We must surround ourselves with God’s Words every day. If you don’t constantly use God’s Words in your daily life, you are in danger of losing the battle, and losing eternal life in the process. It is just like when you don’t use a skill, you forget it or lose it. If I don’t use my knowledge of algebra frequently, I forget it. If I don’t play tennis or any other sport for years, my skills and abilities become rusty and I may even lose my skills.

Just as our good works which are seen by men will lead them to glorify our Father, our bad works, our evil deeds, our wicked words and actions will have the opposite effect. Such wickedness will lead men to blaspheme, to mock God and to reject him.

The devil is always attacking us. But prayer can prevent him from prevailing and drive him back.

We could paraphrase this petition: “Help us so we are not overcome by situations which might lead us to sin!” Just as in any battle, in any war, we must keep fighting to win. Don’t roll over and give up, but with God’s help we must ask even many times each day “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” God will help you. Amen.