

People of God,

Do you take God seriously? How about Satan? When we stop taking God seriously, we'll also stop taking Satan seriously. When we don't pay much attention to God, we probably don't pay much attention to Satan either. This is a danger Jesus makes us aware of when he teaches us to pray, "*Our Father in heaven.... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" If we as Christians know how real and powerful our God is, then we also know that Satan is a real force to be reckoned with. We must never forget that Satan is not more powerful than God. He's certainly not as powerful as God. But he is real. And when we're in tune with God, we also know that temptation is just around the corner.

When it comes to this sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, we are asking the Lord for strength to overcome evil in our lives. Even though we are forgiven of our sins (which we talked about last week in the fifth petition of this prayer), Jesus teaches us in the sixth petition to recognize that sin is still a real issue. We need to deal with it on a daily basis.

Forgiven sinners are not truly repentant if we only desire forgiveness of our sins but don't want to stop sinning. No one knows the power of sin better than the forgiven sinner. We know the awful power and the terrible penalty of sin as well as the destructive force of it (Bast, 68). As a result, the forgiven sinner desires to be freed from the sin that continues to cling to us in our daily thoughts, words and actions. We want to walk as closely to God as possible and we recognize that sin gets in the way. So we pray for help.

The catechism reminds us that we pray because "*by ourselves we are too weak*" to withstand the temptation to sin "*even for a moment.*" The temptation we face is stronger than we can handle on our own. So right at the top, the catechism cuts out any grand thoughts we might have about being able to stand up to temptation on our own. We can't.

That is also why Jesus told his disciples the words Pastor Michael preached on last Sunday morning from John 15. Jesus said,
Jn 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
In other words, Jesus shows us that even the strength to withstand temptation comes from God. And James confirms that when he writes,
James 1:16-17 Don't be deceived.... Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father....
We cannot fight sin alone. We need help from God above.

The battle is against the three sources of temptation, which the catechism reminds us of when it says, “*our sworn enemies--the devil, the world, and our own flesh--never stop attacking us.*” Let’s look at those now.

Deliverance from the Devil

First of all, we must pray for deliverance from the devil. The devil or “Satan is the supreme enemy of God and our souls. He is the temper, the evil mind and personality behind all the forces that would draw us away from God....”, says an old pastor I read (Bast, 67). Ever since Satan made his appearance in the Garden of Eden, he has been a source of temptation from whom we need to pray for deliverance.

The big mistake we might make today is underestimating the devil. We forget that Peter says,

1 Peter 5:8 The devil goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

We see little images of a red tailed, two-horned little man holding a pitchfork. We get the impression that’s he’s just a cartoon character or a little character on our shoulder that we can swipe off like dust or dandruff. We forget that Satan is real and that hates God. Therefore, he also hates God’s children. He wants to see anyone in Christ destroyed. He wants to see our lives made miserable and our witness of Christ to the world shattered. He wants to lead us away from God to face life without the comfort of belonging to Jesus. He would be happy, perhaps, just to get us so discouraged by our sin that we doubt Christ’s power to save us. So he watches for strategic moments when he can unleash some of his flaming arrows of temptation at us.

Just think of how Satan operated against Adam and Eve. They had everything they could possibly want and then some: A magnificent place to live, an abundant supply and variety of food, perfect friendship with each other and perfect fellowship with God who walked and talked with them in the garden. The weather was not too hot and not too cold. Everything was better than our best. Satan came to plant a seed of doubt. “You can have all things except the fruit on one tree. Why would God keep that from you? He’s hiding something from you.” The bait of temptation was perfectly presented. Eve gave in. And Adam followed suit.

Remember how Satan tempted David to commit adultery with Bathsheba? He found David at a vulnerable time, when David was spiritually weak and physically strong. He presented Bathsheba as an attractive package that would greatly improve David’s life and meet his physical desire.

Before we take the first bite, so to speak, it all looks so appealing. That’s Satan’s way. After we’ve given in, though, our eyes like Adam’s and Eve’s are opened and we see what we’ve done and we try to hide it from others and from

God. The price of giving in to temptation from the devil is pain and misery, as David found out.

This isn't a surprise to anyone. We all know this misery firsthand. Every one of us has fallen for the devil's tricks in one way or another. And that's why the Bible tells us to pray for God's help to resist the devil; we can't do it alone. James 4:7 says,

Jas 4:7 Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Paul counsels us in Ephesians 6:11,

Eph 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

This is the example taught by our Lord Jesus himself who was tempted by Satan for 40 days in the wilderness. Jesus resisted Satan by staying close to the Father in prayer and filling his mind with God's word so that he could defend himself from Satan's lies by recalling the truth. When we fill our mind with God's truth and pray, we are putting on God's armour. Then we can more quickly see the lie and so find deliverance from the temptations of Satan.

Deliverance from the World

Next to direct temptations from Satan, the world is another source of temptation. The world is not the universe. It is a way of life. It's life organized without God. It's people seeking satisfaction and contentment in things of this life rather than in God. It's people who want it their way instead of God's. That's why the Apostle Paul warns us in Romans 12:2,

Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.

Think of the time when King David wasn't content to know that the Lord fought his battles for him. So, he ordered that his soldiers be counted. He had given in to worldly thinking, supposing that human strength led to worldly power. He forgot the real power of God behind his success. He was tempted and fell for it. Ananias and Sapphira were not content to simply give all or even some of their money to the Lord without recognition. Instead they pretended to give it all so that they could be honoured among those who gave sacrificially to the Lord. They wanted people to look up to them instead of being content with God's blessing on their lives. They wanted to keep some means of earthly security while appearing to be highly spiritual. They gave in to the temptation of the world to be someone with your name up in lights.

We live in an age of the superstar. Kobe Bryant dies and millions of his worldwide fans says a basketball legend is gone. That's not to say grief is not important but we see huge outpourings of sympathy because he's a superstar. Similarly, Connor McDavid hurts his leg and it's front-page news and water cooler conversation. But if you hurt your leg, hardly anyone bats an eye. Again, there's nothing worldly about playing hockey but the world measures success differently

than the Lord. When our children or grandchildren think about a career, often times we encourage them to pursue higher paying jobs. That's the first criteria we often use. But that is success the world's way. That's not God's first criteria. When someone faithfully serves the Lord his or her whole life by reaching out to people in need, not many in our world will take notice. There will be no shining lights and billboards with that person's picture and name.

One of the best or worst examples of being led into temptation by the world is the story of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. The most pivotal verse in that whole story is Genesis 13:12.

Gen 13:12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

In and of itself, it wouldn't be bad if Lot made his home near Sodom. The problem was in his heart. Lot had his mind on the things of the world. Lot became a successful businessman in Sodom. He sat with today's equivalent of the Wall Street boys at the city gate. And as the story unfolds, we note that he became too much a part of the life of that city. His wife became so enmeshed in the world that she just couldn't resist looking back when God was destroying the city and said, "Don't look!"

The world creeps into every part of our lives if we don't keep watch out. However, the solution is not to become Amish or to live in a monastery. The Lord teaches us to be in the world and not of it but that does not mean we must set ourselves up to be associated with our larger society as little as possible. It is not wrong to enjoy the advances our society has brought us, but it is wrong to let the world dictate why we do certain things. We should not chase after success as the world measures it as if we have to build our own security.

On the contrary, we do our best with the gifts God gives us and trust him to bless our work as he sees fit. We trust him to take care of our needs. We keep the Lord front and centre in our marriages, families, work, entertainment, education, etc. We have Christ on our side. And as we stay focussed on him, we shouldn't be afraid of the world overtaking us. After all, Scriptures tell us in 1 John 4:4,

1 Jn 4:4 Greater is he (namely Christ) who is in us than he that is in the world.

The Apostle Paul not only tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world," he goes on to challenge us instead,

Rom 12:2 ...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Let the things of Christ shape how you live your life in this world. "Then," he says, "you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." When we do God's will we are not giving in to the temptations of the world. Our reliance and direction must come from the Lord, not from the world.

Deliverance from the Flesh

The final source of temptation from which we must pray for deliverance is the flesh. “The flesh is our own human nature which is corrupted by sin and inclined to yield to evil.” (Bast, 67). Because we are conceived and born in sin, we have a natural inclination to certain sins. It makes no difference how it comes to us. The fact is we have sinful desires that we need to learn to resist. One person may be more susceptible to natural inclinations to share juicy gossip with others because that person has a need to make herself feel good by putting other people down. Another may have the inclination to want more. Greed needs to be checked otherwise it leads him to be corrupt in business so as to make a buck at all costs. It could even lead him to outright stealing.

The flesh manifests itself in each of us and we each probably know where we are weakest.

James describes the temptation of the flesh like this in our Bible reading:
Jas 1:14 each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Seems to me that James boils all our temptation down to us. Whether that temptation comes from the devil or the world, it is acted upon by us. And therefore we can't point the finger and say, “the devil made me do it” any more than Eve could say, “*The serpent deceived me and I ate.*” God still held Eve accountable for her sin. And we cannot blame our falling into temptation on the world and say, “I couldn't resist it!” God has given us the means to resist. No matter what the source of temptation, we either act on it or we don't. And so we either give into temptation or we reject it.

If we are trusting in the strength of our flesh, we will not succeed. In the hymn *Stand up for Jesus*, it says, “*the arm of flesh will fail you; you dare not trust your own.*” But instead we are urged, *put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer*, as Paul instructs us. It is only in prayerful reliance upon Jesus Christ that we will succeed in the battle against the forces of temptation. Later we'll sing *A Mighty Fortress* which says, *And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us; The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.* So the catechism rightly reminds us of our desperate need for Christ's help in this battle against sin and evil when it concludes this Lord's Day saying,

*And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong
with the strength of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may not go down to defeat
in this spiritual struggle,
but may firmly resist our enemies*

until we finally win the complete victory.

Remember, the victory is already accomplished through Jesus. Now we must learn more and more to depend on him and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in us that he supplies! We all have much to learn about this. I certainly do. But it's so encouraging to know that Jesus is the victor. He freely forgives and he is always with us to help us, to deliver us from temptation.

This is good to keep in mind as well when we are praying about our loved ones or neighbours who are not walking with the Lord. What we must realize is that this is a spiritual battle. These loved ones have been deceived by Satan, the world and the flesh. So we must pray for their deliverance and not give up. Rather than trying to argue with them or judging them continually, we are much better off praying for the Lord to deliver them against all the temptations they are giving in to. We are not strong enough to help them but we serve a great, victorious and loving Saviour who is strong. He can open their eyes and soften their hard hearts. He can open their eyes to their sin and his grace. He can make them strong with the strength of the Holy Spirit to turn from sin and live for Christ.

So we move forward in our walk with the Lord in the confidence that the price of victory has been paid by Christ. Christ took on Satan and won! He faced the temptations of the world when Satan offered him all the kingdoms of the world. Christ kept in mind a greater, heavenly kingdom. And Christ overcame the flesh and took on the sins of our flesh when we resisted the devil all the days of his earthly life. We have nothing to fear with Christ on our side. In thankfulness and confidence, let us seek his help daily in the battle against all the temptations we face. With his help we shall taste, little by little, more and more the ultimate victory over sin that is ours through Christ alone.