



Prayer of the Day

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Homily

I greet you in the name of Jesus, the One who died for us. Amen.

It is interesting to watch children trying to understand who the people in their lives are. Grammy is Mommy's mother and Oma is Daddy's mother. Then, they try out figure the who's who of their aunts and uncles.

How do they figure all this out at such an early age; entirely by relational identity. We tend to think of our identity as highly personal and something we develop, discover, or even create on our own.

Yet, it turns out that our identity is firmly and unavoidably rooted in our relationships. I realized this the time I attended my first parent- teacher night; I was no longer Bruce Thompson but Sarah Thompson's Dad. So, we can't be a father without kids, a husband without a wife, a teacher without students, a citizen without a country.

This morning across this great nation of Canada, many preachers will speak on the stories found in Genesis and Matthew and will conclude: be like Jesus and resist temptation. I believe there is

more and the key to understanding these particular readings comes from the idea of relational identity.

In the first reading, the serpent offers Adam and Eve the promise of God-like knowledge. The serpent, during the conversation with Eve, suggests that God is not trustworthy. “Did God really say...?” the serpent begins to sow seeds of doubt and then advocates, “You will not die,” contradicting the words of God.

The serpent has now undermined Adam and Eve’s relationship and confidence in God. The serpent then invites them to establish their own identity, independent of their relationship with God: “when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Who needs God, when you can be “like God” on your own? Yes, they attempt to define themselves apart from God but end up in a tragic condition.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, following Jesus’ baptism, we hear the Spirit of God’s voice from heaven proclaiming, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” It is then, the same Spirit which leads Jesus to the wilderness and the devil begins to work on him. The devil tries to undermine the identity of Jesus that had been given at his baptism. “*If you are the son of God,*” calls into question Jesus’ identity. The devil is seeking to rob Jesus of his God-given identity and replace it with a false one.

Jesus resists the temptations not through an act of brute force but rather by relying on an identity founded through his relationship with God.

The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism; at our baptism the Spirit also came upon us. The voice from heaven claimed Jesus as God’s beloved Son; at our baptism words were spoken that made it clear that we too are claimed and loved by God. We are children of God. I have come to understand, temptation is not so often *temptation toward something* – usually thought of or portrayed as doing something we shouldn’t – but it is rather the *temptation away from something* – namely our relationship with God. And as we see in this story, the devil came to Jesus in the wilderness and Jesus refused to let anything separate him from his relationship with God.

In our wildness, the devils of life seek to steal our identity. Each day we are overwhelmed by countless advertisements that seek to create in us a sense of lack, insecurity, and inadequacy, undermining our God-given gift of identity with the promise that if we buy this car, drink that brand of beer, or use these teeth brightener strips and you will be more acceptable to others. The message of our consumer-consumption culture is simply this: you are not enough. Not skinny enough, smart enough, pretty enough, strong enough, rich enough to deserve respect, love, and acceptance.

And here is the thing; this is a lie. It is a demonic attempt to rob of us our identity; far worse than any robber we have been trained to fear. And Jesus shows that our identity lodges firmly in God’s good gift of love and promise.

Jesus demonstrated just how deeply God loves us by going to the cross. Jesus did not die on the cross in order that we might be acceptable or to make God loving. Jesus died to show us that

God already loves us and has declared that we are not just acceptable but also treasured, priceless beyond measure.

It's been said that when Martin Luther felt oppressed by his conscience or plagued by doubt, fear, or insecurity, he would sometimes shout out in defiance, echoing Jesus' words today, "Away with you Satan! I am baptized!" The seal of promise inscribed on our foreheads at our Holy Baptism reminds us that God had declared us worthy of love, dignity and respect and has pledged to be both **with** us and **for** us throughout all of our lives. The cross on our foreheads says we are enough, actually more than enough, as God has accepted us as God's own beloved children.

My friends in Christ. I suspect, we do from time to time, doubt our identity as one claimed by God; wondering if God really meant what God said, "You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." To claim to be a Christian means that a significant component of our identity is that you are a child of God. And so, I ask: Do you believe it? Does it make a difference for your life? Or, do you allow the strings of others to pull you away from living in and embodying your identity as a child of God?

Please hear this: Don't give in. Don't fall for it. Instead, trust that you have already passed the identity test and decide that this Lent your life will be different because of it.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Prayers used by permission by Augsburg Fortress – Sundays and Seasons

STTLC Communiqué

In Our Prayers Today.....Nancy Briscoe, Mike Harrington, Lila Martinat, Irlavere Tubbe, Bobby Keuhl, Adele Krieger, Tracy Schori and Christa Reitlingshoefer.

We are doing it again! Lenten Food Drive – in support of St. Joseph's Food Bank starts today and will continue until Easter. If you are able, please support this drive as the need is great. Watch as the table in the entrance grows with food as we support others. (Please check the expiry dates on the items.)

Also note.....cash donations should be given directly to them and not through offering envelopes. Thank you.

Camp Lutherlyn Camper Sponsorships – St. Timothy's is sponsoring up to 5 children/youth for 1 Week each at Camp Lutherlyn this summer. You can obtain an Application Form from the church office and you can register your child online at lutherlyncamp.ca and then go to the Registration Page.

Lenten Services at St. Timothy's

Our Lenten journey with our Lord to the cross has begun. This season of Lent prepares us for our Easter celebrations. It reminds us that to rise with Jesus we have to first die with Jesus.

Midweek Lenten Services will be held each Wednesday during Lent at 7:00 pm. We will be joined by the congregation of The Parish of the Valley Anglican. Come, bring a friend and worship and then join in a time of coffee and fellowship in Jubilee Hall following the service.

