



The First Sunday in Lent.

The Collect.

O LORD who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

This Collect is addressed directly to the Lord Jesus Christ and is an original Collect written by the Reformers for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. This Collect replaces the medieval collect which called for strict fasting and good works as a means of earning merit – a view alien to the New Testament faith. The Collect is based upon Hebrews 4:15 - *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* Christ was tempted with our same feelings of infirmity, yet remained sinless.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. (Matt 4:1) What are we told in this text was the purpose of the Spirit leading Christ into the wilderness? It was for the purpose of being tempted. Christ faced three cardinal temptations, 1) Temptations of the Flesh. 2) Temptations of the Mind. And 3) Temptations of the Spirit. (Mind, Body, and Soul, we might say).

It was a sore temptation at that. Christ was tempted, first of all, in His fleshly desire for nourishing bread: *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread* (Matt 4:3) Despite His ravening hunger, Christ refused the temptation of Satan: ***It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*** (Matt 4:4) It is noteworthy that Satan usually, and he does here, begin his tempting airs with a question in order to establish doubt. But Christ relies not upon human understanding, but always responds to the temptations with these three words: **IT IS WRITTEN!** We, too, rather than leaning on our own understanding, must appeal to the Word of God in our defense.

Secondly, Satan appeals to the mind (pride and logic): *Then the devil taketh him*

up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Matt 4:5-6) Here Satan appeals to the logic and rationale of the mind. Surely God has promised in the 91st Psalm to defend us as Satan states. So why not go ahead and put God to the test and prove, for the sake of pride, that Christ is the Son of God? This is a direct appeal to the mind of man and not the Mind of God. But the Mind of Christ is truly the Mind of God. ***Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*** (Matt 4:7)

Thirdly, and finally, Satan appeals to the spiritual: *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* (Matt 4:8-9) Satan promises, always, that which he cannot deliver. Even though he is prince of the air, and lower kingdoms, what he promises Christ is a lie! If Christ were to succumb to the temptation of worshipping Satan, all would be lost. Though Christ is physically able to sin, His virtue and nature as Son of God forbid it. ***Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*** (Matt 4:10) When Satan has released his fiery salvos against mind, body, and soul, and we yet resist, he will leave us alone for a time. ***Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*** (Matt 4:11) Every temptation resisted builds strong spiritual bones and muscles.

Archbishop Cranmer's salient point in this Collect is not that of warfare between flesh and spirit, but more emphatically the discipline exercised through all of our human faculties by the Holy Spirit of God. In the granting of sovereignty of that Spirit in our lives, and the obedience thereto, it becomes a natural tendency to resist evil rather than the more common natural inclination to sin. This is the process of sanctification working in the members (all members) of each Christian soul. We must not excuse certain sins as owing to a weak flesh and contrary to a willing spirit. We must resist sin in our whole being – mind, body and soul at once. ***For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*** (2 Tim 1:7) Need I remind you that the strongest of these is love because love is life in Christ: ***For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*** (Romans 8:38-39)

This prayer points out that our abstinence from sin comes not at our own power, but that endowed us by the Holy Spirit. ***Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory.*** Further we must know that owing to our only righteous works belonging to God who works in us, all honor and glory are His and not our own goodness.

When temptations arise, will you tell the Devil to "get behind you?" For each of his wily temptations will you rely, not upon his oft-misquoted and twisted scripture, but the pure, infallible Word of God in your response? If so, victory shall be yours!