



The Third Sunday in Lent.

The Collect.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Those who wear their religion on their sleeve need not appeal to God for defense. Their defense against the spiritual powers of darkness, great though those powers be, will remain the arm of withering flesh. Pride is its own reward and can never coupled with our prayers for God's protection and grace. Humility is a rare commodity in today's world. After all, do we not all need a positive self-image? What good will that false self-image be in the grave of worms and decay? We even train our youth to believe that they must have a good opinion of themselves. Good opinions of our own worth will scarce purchase a drop of water in the fires of hell. It is only when we realize that without humble love we are "nothing worth" (as stated in the Collect for Quinquagesima) can we be worth a glance of grace from heaven. This is another Gregorian Collect that was composed when the enemies were at the gate. The Roman Church at the time of the writing of this Collect was not yet so 'full of itself.' It was not lifted up in pride, but prayed daily for the preservation of body and soul from those monsters without the gate, and the demons from within the gate. Is it any different today except that the Church is too asleep to know?

WE beseech thee Here is another vivid portrayal that our prayers in public worship are communal – that is, these prayers are timeless and worthy of being lifted to God with hearts united in the faith we profess. The prayer following can be uttered in the heart of every worshipper to good profit. This is one of the strengths of Prayer Book worship. Individual prayers of extemporaneous nature may contain elements unrelated to the other worshippers, or may even contain appeals to things contrary to our doctrine and faith. But all of the prayers of the Prayer Book are based on sound biblical principles and truths. To whom should our prayers be directed? To *Almighty God!*

"... *look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants...*" What are hearty desires except those desires that have been filtered by love and faith in the most intimate chambers of our hearts? Can a proud and boastful suppliant have such hearty desires? I doubt that they can have. Their desires are based on a proud mind and flesh, not a humble heart. How does God view pride? Not very highly, I'm afraid. It is pride itself that separates us from the grace of God: *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* (Psalms 10:4) *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the*

froward mouth, do I hate. (Prov 8:13) Space does not afford the luxury of quoted many more verses of God's condemnation of pride, but those already provided are sufficient to the point. Just remember, the mighty Lucifer fell as a result of pride.

"...***and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty.***" Truly this is the Right Hand of Supreme, Sovereign Authority. I may swear an oath with my right hand uplifted, or sign a bank note with my right hand of authority; but my right hand is limited to the feeble power of man alone. The right hand of a king has serious implications, but the Right Hand of the King of Kings seals every truth and judgment. If God stretches forth His Right Hand, you may be sure that Heaven and earth may be shaken.

".....***to be our defence against all our enemies...***" God's defense is not a limited defense, but will defend against ALL enemies. While we all were once enemies of God, those who have been received by grace may now appeal for that powerful arm of defense in the Almighty. What defense do we need always? It has a direct bearing on a defense from the spiritual powers of darkness that assail us daily; and it has a relevance to the Gospel text for this Sunday from Luke 11:14-28. If we may consider the world a jungle (and it is definitely so from a spiritual perspective), we pass through that jungle with a thousand hungry eyes watching our every move. At the first stumble (at sin) those eyes inform vicious claws and teeth to attack. That is the devil's way, and it has not changed an iota since that Old Red Dragon fell from Heaven as lightning. He has never, and WILL never, be anything other than the mortal enemy of your soul. ***Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*** (1 Peter 5:8) If it pleases you to sin, just be ready for the devouring lion. As God said to Job from out of the whirlwind (regarding that dragon, Leviathan): ***Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more.*** (Job 41:8) The same is true of Satan – his power is beyond that of man to oppose. Only God can win the battle against such a vicious creature.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.