



The Fourth Sunday in Lent.

The Collect.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10)

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

We must have learned long ago in our childhood Bible school that there is not anything we must do to go to Hell. Hell is where we are headed the moment we are born into the world. If we simply do nothing, then we shall surely wind up in the fires of Hell. Similarly, there is nothing we can do to earn eternal life – it is a gift of God to those who believe. If you have believed upon the name of Jesus Christ, then you have responded to God's call as His chosen and elect. Our good works will not keep us from Hell, nor earn for us an entrance into Heaven. But faith, responding to the Grace of God, will, indeed, gain for us such an entrance to Heaven.

All comfort and all grace is from God. It is never earned, but comes 'paid on arrival.' It is, as the Collect avers, a grant and not a wage. Thankfully, we are not paid wages for our wages would result in a loss of grace. "*For the wages of sin is death;*" (sin ALL have sinned, I prefer to forgo the wages to which I am entitled, don't you?).... "*but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Romans 6:23) It is so clear and simple, isn't it? We have all earned our suite in Hell, but God has made a free provision for us in His mansions on High.

This prayer of Collect comes from the Gregorian Sacramentary.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do

worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved

Please note the quality that triggers grace – it is MERCY. We have seen many clergy come and go in our church and in others that are within our purview. The single thing that distinguishes a true minister of God from all others, regardless of a parchment attesting by man's hand that they are ministers, is the single quality of that Compassion and Mercy that was in Christ. It matters not how hard they labor, how long their hours, how accomplished their sermons, or how broad their experience; if they have not the Compassion of Christ for the little children, for the widows and orphans, for their fellow men and women in all walks of life, then they are not true ministers of God. If their concern is more for personal reward than for the additions to the family of God, they are without hope as ministers. Are we judgmental against others? Remember that same judgment will be levied against you.

Being in the midst of the Lenten Season, we may be feeling overwhelmed by the sense of our sinful unworthiness, but bear in mind that even our unworthiness cannot compare with the altogether worthiness of Christ to redeem us. Just as on the mountain two thousand years ago, He is still able to spread a table before us in the wilderness of our sins.

How is it that the Grace of God is a comfort? When we know that it is the Grace of God that has saved us, and not any personal merit we may boast of, then we are comforted in not wondering always if we have done quite enough to earn our salvation. We are comforted as a little child in knowing that, though we have displeased our parents today, their love for us has not diminished. We are as loved in our disobedience as we were loved in our times of favor. But the child, like the Christian, must learn through parental discipline, to improve on his incorrigible behaviors under the father's counsel and discipline. If you are recipient of the grace and call of God, He will not turn you lose for childish misadventures. Did He not tell us: "...*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Heb 13:5) As far as I know, Christ has never lost any that belonged to Him for as He prayed the night of His betrayal in the Upper Room: *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.* (John 17:12) Of course, the son of perdition – Judas Iscariot – was never a follower of Christ for the Scriptures tell us that he was a devil. (see John 6:70)

I hope that we will know with certainty at the conclusion here of this devotion that we deserve to die for our sins, but that it was Christ Himself who died in our stead. Now we are blessed to have a Heavenly comforter to strengthen us through the feeding of the Bread of Heaven just as that ancient multitude was fed, nourished, and comforted on the mountain slope overlooking the Galilean Waters. Have you enjoyed that comfort and strength today?