



The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity.

The Collect.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

8. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9. Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9)

This Gelasian Collect was translated by Archbishop Cranmer to say "*grant us thy grace to avoid the temptations of the world, etc*" but the learned revisers of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer made the seemingly small change to read: "*grant us thy grace to withstand the temptations of the world, etc*". Though the change of a single word may seem trivial, it is not, for we shall certainly encounter the temptations of the world. They cannot be avoided and are often allowed by the Lord for our preparation as courageous people of God.

How do we "*withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil?*" How do we withstand the several diseases of the physical world? First, and most desirable, is that we are inoculated to be immune from those diseases that threaten our physical health. Secondly, there are some diseases for which there is no vaccine and for which we must receive prompt attention. The temptations of the world to our souls are of a similar nature. The Devil seeks to infect us with the disease of sin. If he is successful, a diseased sinner becomes one who carries his contagion into the presence of all with whom he associates. Sin, like wild weeds, spreads across the landscape without cultivation or tillage. It is not the weeds, but the good grass, vegetables and fruits that need careful watering, fertilization, and tillage.

Is it possible to be immune to some of the Devil's temptations? By all means, it is possible! The best immunity is the avoidance of diseased environments. If we restrain from close familiarity with those who are constantly driven to lust and sinful inclinations, we shall avoid those direct temptations foisted upon those who do so associate with the friends of the world and of the Devil. But there are temptations that

lie dormant deep in the heart of man that will emerge from time to time in spite of Godly love and zeal. How are these temptations confronted and defeated? By watchfulness in guarding the soul, and in constant prayerfulness, we may withstand those strong and ungodly temptations that arise in the heart of every Christian: *And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.* (Mark 14:37-38)

If we are strong in prayer, and watchful against that old Adversary of our souls, he will elect to bring his greater temptations to bear elsewhere. When Christ is the sole owner of our hearts, no other shall dare to invade those sacred chambers of the Temple of God. We shall be stronger than the Devil and all of his cunning traps if we have the One in our hearts who has handily defeated that old Dragon. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.* (Luke 11:21-22)

Sin is dirty. It changes our countenance of purity into a grimy image of filth. It makes us sick and we lose the energy to perform good service to God and man; and we gain a greater desire to go to the saloon of Satan for more of the "hair from the dog that bit us." We track our filth everywhere we go. One little 'white' lie about a friend (or even a stranger) may circulate among the multitudes until that person's character and reputation are savaged. One promiscuous encounter can ruin a marriage and the lives of children. An aged parent, dishonored, carries that testimony directly to the face of Christ when he departs this life. Sin has consequences that are often irreparable.

Satan is not omniscient, but he does have a mind and the means of observation. He has learned the weaknesses in our defenses. He has watched intently as we have prepared our lines. He knows where the walls of our souls are weak and unprotected. It is at these points that he concentrates his forces and makes his assaults. If he is able to penetrate our defenses, even at the weak points, he gains command of the battlefield in rendering even our strong defense impotent. He has outmaneuvered our flanks and gained a tactical access to our innermost deployments of battle. When our lines are overrun, we have only the option to call upon our reserves – hidden and unseen to the enemy. If that reserve is God Almighty, He will expeditiously rout the unwelcome enemy from our ranks, strengthen our interior lines, and restore order on our outward defenses.

What one vaccine has the greatest effect in dispelling the sinful nature? *With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* (Psalms 119:10-11) We defeat the wiles of the Devil by seeking the Lord with our WHOLE HEART, then there remains no faculties free to contemplate sin. We hide God's Whole Counsel in our hearts which is a defense and a fortress against sin. A casual piety will not do – it is the whole being that must belong to God – the Heart, the Mind, the Soul! Is your faith a casual faith, or does God own your soul – lock, stock, and barrel, Friend? If Christ is the SOVEREIGN of your heart, no enemy can take possession of it.

Is He?