

In the Collect of the Day, the prayer which serves to bring out the theme of a particular Sunday, we prayed that the Lord would grant us grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and to follow the Lord. There's a contrast, a distinction, that's being made, one of walking in the ways of God versus walking in the ways of the devil. This distinction is even more refined by our three readings, pointing to a particular issue: pride – the way of the devil – versus humility – the way of God.

So first off: pride. This is illustrated – and condemned – several places in both our readings and in the Scriptures as a whole. It's pride that Solomon warns against in Proverbs, where he writes, "Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great."

It's pride that causes the Pharisees in our Gospel reading to jockey for the places of honor at the dinner table, and also pride that causes them to see their own reputations as more important than the suffering of the man with dropsy. It's pride that causes someone to hastily bring what his eyes have seen into court before finding out further detail, as Solomon also speaks against.

All of these examples from our readings are connected by pride: the elevation of self over others, the trust in one's own worthiness or knowledge or public standing without regard to others.

What makes pride like this the way of the devil? Well, remember what got the devil to where he is now. He was one of God's great and mighty angels, a creature of incredible power and beauty. Yet his pride led him to put himself forward in the King's presence. He even tried to put himself above the King, Satan seeing his plan for the universe as better than God's.

He also sought the place of honor, being envious of man's position as having dominion over all creation and being created in God's own image. Satan's tempting of Adam and Eve in the Garden was a ploy designed to cause their fall from this position of honor – if he couldn't have it, then neither should they!

We see also that Satan loves to bring accusations about God's people before God's court. He does this concerning Job, and he used to throw accusations at all God's people. Yet these were made in haste, and in making them, Satan ended up being answered by the righteousness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As a consequence, the Bible tells us, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."

Satan, like the prideful people in Proverbs and Luke, is put lower by Christ Himself. His being thrown down is something we'll explore more next week during the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. Suffice to say, Satan's pride brought about his downfall.

What then does it look like to walk in this way of pride, the way of Satan? The Pharisees give us a good example in the Gospel reading. Notice how they put themselves forward, trying to establish that they are the authorities, the big shots. They haven't invited Jesus to dinner for His company, or out

of a sincere desire to discuss the Scriptures and humbly learn from what He might have to say. No, they invite Jesus to dinner to try to entrap Him.

They bring some poor, suffering man to the dinner, not seating him or offering him help or comfort, but using him as bait for their trap. They hope that Jesus will slip up and say something that they can quickly rip out of context and use to condemn him, bringing what their eyes have seen (but not understood) quickly into court, as Solomon condemned. This is all so that they can have the places of honor as the arbiters of God's Law, the ones who decide the answers to "Did God really say...?"

But just as He did to their master, Satan, Jesus quickly sends them down to a lower place by both His divine power and divine wisdom. Notice how they at first remain silent, but then are unable to reply. The Greek is literally that they do not have the strength to answer. They have exalted themselves, and they have been humbled.

Lest we puff ourselves up with pride and think that we've never be arrogant fools like those Pharisees, let us have an honest look in the mirror at the pride which tempts us, and into which we do occasionally fall. Humanity in general, because of the sin we've all inherited from Adam, tends to elevate ourselves and believe that we really don't need God.

For the more hardened individuals, this is something they're believing all the time. "God, Jesus, religion – it's all fairy tales, primitive stories made up because ancient man was stupid." Such people think that they've got control of their lives, that they can do what they want. They hold the place of honor, and they'll decide who and what is worthy of their time or not.

Such people are often brought low by God, their dreams and ambitions crashing down when the shifting sands of the world give way. And even for those who seem to have it all, there remains the one thing that humbles all men: death. No amount of planning, effort, knowledge, anything, can change the fact that they are mortal. And in the end, they are brought down, down to the grave, to Sheol itself.

Christians, too, are tempted to elevate themselves. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh would often tempt us that we've done enough, we're better than most, we the "good" ones, and so we need not actually seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We're tempted to live just like the rest of the world and just be "good Christians" on Sunday mornings.

God then often humbles us, sending troubles, illnesses, suffering, into our lives. We run to God, asking Him to deliver us from whatever trouble has come. And yet, after He has delivered us, what are we tempted to do? Go right back to living as we were beforehand.

We're tempted to pridefully see ourselves and our desires as most important, with God, His Word, His Church, just there to run to if we get in trouble or can't handle things ourselves.

Another temptation of pride, common to believers and unbelievers alike, is that hasty judgment which Solomon speaks against. We see something on our social media feed and instantly we have to render judgment. We catch a snippet of a sound bite on the news, and right away we're outraged. We hear a rumor and as soon as the opportunity comes, we pass it along.

Should something come along that contradicts our idea, we want to instantly dismiss it, pridefully believing that there's no way we – and our favorite talking heads or celebrities – could be

wrong! This is a source of so much conflict and strife in our nation, our communities, even our families.

Yet if we continue to build ourselves up and up and up, it's only a matter of time before we come crashing back down. Pride ultimately fails, because that which it is grounded in, sin, will and must fail before the righteous God.

So instead of walking the path of pride, the way of the devil, let us walk in the path of humility, following in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior. Humility is praised throughout the Scriptures, be it in the Song of Hannah or the Magnificat sung by the Virgin Mary, the meekness of Moses, the blessedness of those mentioned in the Beatitudes, or in our readings today.

Solomon commends to us that we listen to words fitly spoken and the reproving of the wise, for through them the Lord grants us wisdom. Jesus, expounding on the reading from Proverbs, says that not only should you not put yourself forward in the presence of the great, but instead take the lowest place, the seat of less honor. Do not seek to exalt yourself, but let yourself be exalted by others. Do not seek the glory given by men, who are fickle and constantly changing their opinions, but rather the glory of God, who is steadfast and grants rewards that never perish. In contrast to the selfish focus of pride, humility constantly focuses on the other, especially on the Lord God.

Humility is the way of our Lord, not only because He commends it to us in His holy Word, but because He Himself shows forth perfect humility, and by His humility many are raised up.

Think about what our Lord Jesus endured as He walked this earth as a true man. He didn't cause Himself to be born in a palace, into a life of luxury and ease, but to a lowly carpenter and his humble betrothed wife. After Jesus began His public ministry, He endured further hardship and suffering in body, mind, and soul.

Consider even this episode in our Gospel. He's invited to dinner and hospitality, yet faces scrutiny and entrapment once He walks in the door. How did He respond? In righteous indignation, did He smite all those Pharisees and lawyers with dropsy, that they might suffer as the poor man they'd used as bait? Did He put impossible questions to them and mock them for their lack of knowledge and wisdom? Did He use His perfect knowledge to reveal all their embarrassing secrets, humiliating them before their peers? No. Jesus did none of that.

Instead, He went to this dinner, knowing full well that His invitation was a trap. He cared for the man being taken advantage of, miraculously healing him, and at the same time cared for the souls of all those in attendance by calling attention to their pride and hardness of heart.

He then taught them, using the Scriptures which His Spirit had inspired and His own divine wisdom, again to bring those who desired His harm to repentance and faith, that they too might be saved.

The Lord Jesus humbling Himself and heading into harm for the sake of others is seen most clearly at the cross. Hebrews puts it beautifully where it tells us that "Jesus, the founder and perfecter

of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus, who is the beginning and the end of saving faith, indeed the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all creation, humbled Himself and went to the cross of His own free will. He endured the shame, the shame of being struck and spit upon by the Sanhedrin and mockingly worshiped by the Roman soldiers, the shame of being paraded through Jerusalem and crucified naked outside the walls where all could see, the shame of being mocked by the Jews who challenged Him to come down if He really was the Messiah, the shame of having so many people see Him portrayed as a villain and blasphemer and believe it, the shame of His Father turning away His face from His beloved Son, despite the sins He bore being those of others and not His own.

But in all this, He saw it as joy. Not joy because He liked suffering. Not joy because He was really looking forward to rubbing everyone’s face in it when He rose from the dead.

No, joy because He knew that by His suffering, He was making the many to be accounted righteous. He gladly bore the torments, because He knew that by His stripes we – you, me, all people – might be made whole. He did not seek His own glory, as He had said before: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’” And glorify Him the Father would, raising Him up from the grave, never to die again, and exalting Him to the highest place of honor, the right hand of power and majesty on high.

And even there, dwelling in inapproachable light, surrounded by the invincible angel hosts who endlessly sing His praises, He still chooses to hear our prayers, to watch over each and every one of His children, to go after every single sheep who would wander from His flock. He is the Almighty God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and yet He still chooses to humble Himself, even coming in bread and wine, that we undeserving sinners might hold the Holy One of Israel in our hands, taking Him into ourselves for the forgiveness of those sins.

As those forgiven by such a mighty yet humble God, how then should we live? St. Paul directs us: “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”

The Apostle gives us an example to follow, for though he was a prisoner for the Lord, nevertheless abounded in faith and humility before God. He gave up the prestigious life of a Pharisee, becoming instead an evangelist, spreading the Gospel while enduring hunger, thirst, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, and finally martyrdom.

Why did he do it? He wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, and said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

We, who also have loved Christ’s appearing, walk after Christ and those who followed Him by the Spirit’s power. We seek not the glory of the world, which is passing away, but with St. Paul, that

crown of righteousness, which the Lord awards by grace through the free gift of faith. God is the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light and who leads us to our heavenly home.

By His Spirit dwelling in our hearts, we seek to be humble. We do not put ourselves forward or brag about how great we are, but instead humbly speak God's Word of truth, for it is God, not the world, whom we serve. We seek to be gentle, especially when it comes to correction of error. We pray for patience, seeking both the truth and the appropriate time to speak it.

And we bear with one another, enduring each other's shortcomings and sins, remembering that we too are sinners who constantly fall short of the glory of God. We direct sinners to repentance while humbly seeking repentance ourselves, always looking to the God who humbled Himself upon the cross for us.

Jesus says, "For everyone who exalts Himself will be humbled," and this is certainly true, either in this life or the next. Yet He continues, "and he who humbles himself will be exalted," pointing to His own great humility and exaltation by His Father. Those who follow Christ and cling to Him in humble faith, forsaking the world's glory, will most certainly be exalted by Him in the life to come.

In Jesus' name, amen.