

## **Watch and Pray**

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Garden of Eden, where everything was perfect, Satan came to Adam and Eve and poisoned their minds with his lying, forked tongue. Adam and Eve were deceived, and this ruined everything. Death began to touch all creation: flowers began to wither; animals lost their tameness; fruit began rotting on the trees; insects began biting. Man went into hiding from a God whose visits he used to look forward to with such eagerness. Man began aging, and laboring, sweating, suffering, and dying. Adam and Eve lived a long, long time the Scriptures say, but they would eventually die and shrivel back into the dust from which they were formed. All of these things were the physical consequences of their sin, but there was something even worse that came from it. So they wanted to talk and listen to Satan? Well, by their rebellion against the will of God, they and all their descendants earned the right to do just that forever, in hell.

In our text from St. Matthew's gospel, we are in another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had just ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey a few days earlier, right past this garden. Now here he is, standing—trying to—under the heavy weight of his suffering for the sins of the world, which was already beginning. Here was “ground zero”; here, in this garden, the Son of God would begin in earnest to undo the hellish work that Satan did in that other garden.

In Psalm 40, a messianic psalm, the Son of God (before he was born as Jesus) prophesied about himself: “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart” (Ps 40:7,8).

Tonight, this same Son of God who came for us speaks from this garden across the centuries and tells us three words of truth to Jesus as we walk with him on our Lenten journey to Calvary: **Watch and pray.**

- 1. Watch our Savior faithfully do the will of God.**
- 2. Pray that God's will also be done in us.**

### *1. Watch our Savior faithfully do the will of God.*

There have been great tragedies in the history of the world caused by such small, small things. Think, for instance, of how in 1986 the space shuttle *Challenger* and its crew were destroyed shortly after liftoff because a small piece of equipment—an O-ring—had failed. Or think of the Carr fire this past fall. Just one little spark from a car crash, and yet so much destruction.

In the Garden of Eden, it seemed to be such a small thing—a little choice that the devil was offering Eve. But it was a deep, profound, and wickedly genius temptation. Satan wanted to corrupt the will of man. “Look at you!” he said. “You are the crown of God's creation, even above me. But don't you think God should treat you more as an equal than as a—servant? I know a way to make that happen. . . .”

Ever since then, our human will has been in a relentless battle with God's will. Think how often we use that first person pronoun. We talk about “my life” and what “I” want. In our world, we hear people assert all the time (especially when it comes to their sexuality): “I want to be who I am! I have the right to be me!” This in-born self-centeredness goes beyond sexuality, of course, into every aspect of sinful human life. What Satan did in that first garden was to teach us to defiantly say to God, “No! *My* will be done! *My* will be done! And you have to accept me on my terms, God!” We're born with this defiance; even two-year-olds know how to do this. However, back in the Garden of Eden Satan didn't tell Eve was that this defiance was the very thing that got him thrown out of heaven and condemned to hell—he and his followers with him.

But here in our gospel is the second Adam—Jesus. He has come to do everything right, to make everything right. He won't blow it as the first Adam did.

Watch what it is going to cost him to do that. He took the three—Peter, James, and John—with him and told them to watch. Not to watch for Judas, not to watch for soldiers or danger, but to watch *him*. Watch—and try to understand what is going on. These three had been with Jesus when he had raised a little girl from the dead. These

three had stood for a moment in Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. But they needed to watch him now, at this hour, to understand that being the Messiah did not mean shining success after shining success, triumph, glory, fame, power, etc. Rather, it meant Jesus humbling himself and being obedient to God's will, suffering even death on a cross for the sins of the world.

Jesus' emotional state as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane speaks volumes. There are stories of early Christian martyrs in the years after Jesus ascended into heaven, of how they would be condemned to die for their faith and yet would march off to their public executions with joy on their faces and hymns of praise on their lips. They were going to heaven! It wasn't death; it was the beginning of life! The Romans didn't get it. But why then doesn't Jesus face his death the same way? The original words here mean that Jesus could barely stand, that his anxiety was so great that he was literally bewildered and confused. He threw himself facedown on the grass under the burden of it all. What does this mean?

This was going to be no ordinary death. His Father asked him to drink the cup of his judgment—a cup filled with the most vile, putrid, reeking substance there is, because that is what sin is like to God. Jesus would be covered with it and experience God's full wrath. As a true human being, his knees buckled at the very thought.

But watch what he says: **“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”** The tempter had come to a garden again to try his old trick of warping the will. But here he lost. Jesus put aside any defiance he was tempted to show, and instead followed his Father's will and the plan for salvation. Thanks be to God!

## ***2. Pray that God's will also be done in us.***

Yet as he returned to his disciples, what a contrast. They were sleeping. Just an hour earlier, Peter had sworn that he would not forsake Jesus, that he would even be willing to die for Jesus. A few months earlier James and John had confidently asserted to Jesus that they could undergo the same baptism of suffering that Jesus was about to go through. Yet here they all were—asleep—these fishermen who were used to staying up all night on the Sea of Galilee to make a living. To paraphrase Jesus question that shows what answer he expects back, “You guys weren't strong enough to keep watching, were you?” The answer: “No.”

“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” This body is weak, weakened by the sin that lives in it. We know the good and even desire in our new spirit to do it, but so often we just can't. We fail to resist. We fail to watch. We fail to pray.

In the face of this failure, we focus our attention on our Savior's call to spiritual discipline: to watch and pray. Yet Jesus here doesn't tell us to somehow, inside of this weak flesh, find some kind of strength, some kind of resolve to just try harder and do better. He doesn't just say “watch and pray,” but “pray so that you will not fall into temptation.” Prayer is important in the Christian's life. But here Jesus isn't talking about praying for the sick, praying for blessings, or praying in thanksgiving. Rather, Jesus is saying that spiritual discipline is to pray for God's powerful help in the time of testing.

Really, what Jesus is telling the disciples (and us) is no different from what he taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer: “And lead us not into temptation.” This is a prayer for God's protection, God's strength, God's help against the spiritual attacks daily launched against us by the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature.

After all, that is God's will for us, something that we pray with the words of the Third Petition: “Your will be done.” For this is God's will: to break and frustrate every evil plan of Satan and to protect his believers all the way to eternal life through his powerful Word that teaches us to cling in faith to his Son, our only Savior. It is not a prayer that God's will be done *by* us, but rather *for us* and *in us*. This is his good and gracious will, as the catechism says, for which God directs us to pray. May we be faithful in doing so.

And as we see our Savior suffering in the garden, we are encouraged to pray this, for we know how eager and able our Father is both to hear and to help—to his glory and for our salvation. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.