

It began in Eden. We are deceived by the devil's false promises because our mother Eve was deceived. We disobey God's holy commands because our father Adam turned from the word of God by which he lived. We indulge vain and disgusting thoughts because Eve indulged the Satan's questions. We sin against others in our vocations as father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, worker, and employer, because Adam failed to shield his wife from the serpent. We are their children. As sure as the hair, eyes, all sorts of features and characteristics of parents are passed on to their offspring, we are conceived and born in the image of our first parents. It is not possible to not sin.

But we are not passive victims. We do not hear God's threat of death for those who depart from His Word in innocent ignorance and have to ask "What did He mean, 'die'?" We are willing participants. The devil tells us we must take joy, comfort, and security for ourselves, that God is holding out on us, uncaring, unwilling to give us what we need. And we believe him. We show our lack of faith by pursuing idols of all kinds. We fear, love, and trust, in anything and everything other than God.

We test God. We act presumptively, asking His blessing upon what is manifestly wicked. Such as when purported Christian clergy bless an abortion clinic, or a husband commits an affair because, well, he loves his mistress, and God is love, so He will surely understand. It is like Michael Corleone in the Godfather, renouncing Satan at his nephew's baptism while his opponents are being assassinated under his orders. We sin and tell ourselves, "Hey, it's ok. I'm baptized, I can do whatever I want. I was confirmed, I can't go to hell. I'll go through the motions in church, and it's all good."

We avoid the hatred of the world, and pursue the path of least resistance. We seek to make compromises with a world that is bent on our destruction. We shirk the cross which our Lord bids us carry. And so rather than speak the truth in love, we keep our mouths shut. Rather than willingly suffer whatever we must for the sake of Christ's name, we tremble and fear being on the "wrong side of history." We cling to life, goods, and fame as our true treasures, but these cannot last. They will all be snatched away by death. Only the true treasure, Christ, can save.

He can save because He is the only one who has suffered these attacks, these temptations which assail and ensnare us, and He has resisted. Perfectly. The devil lured Him with the comforts of this world, and Jesus shut Satan's mouth with the sufficiency of Scripture. What God has said is enough. What He gives is enough. Arm yourself with His Word, with His promises. Read it. Learn it. That you may wear it as your belt and breastplate, your shoes, shield, and helmet, and wield it against temptation as a sword. When you are tempted, speak God's Word aloud. When Satan throws your sins in your face, proclaim John 3:16 or sing the Agnus Dei in his.

The deceiver quotes Scripture at Jesus. He twists it to lead Jesus into sinful presumption. "The Bible says God will take care of you. No harm will come your way, Jesus. So jump on down!" But the Word of God is clear. We are not to test God. He does lead us into trial and testing. He leads His own Son to the cross. There is no avoiding it, either His cross, or yours. You know the commandments. You have been instructed in what they mean from God's Word. If something is against the plain words of Scripture, do not do it. Do not indulge it. Do not avoid suffering from the sake of Christ's name.

Finally, the devil exhibits his ancient arrogance. Just as he flatly denied God's word in the Garden, telling Eve that she would "**not surely die,**" he brazenly claims the authority to give to Jesus, the eternal, omnipotent God, all the kingdoms of the earth in exchange for worship. Here the living God suffers in His very face, the claim of the devil to be god. And where we have kowtow-ed and bargained with the devil, Jesus resists and drives him off: "**Be gone!**"

Jesus lived in perfect faith toward His Father in heaven. He lived in perfect love toward His neighbors. He kept the Law for us. In Adam, human flesh disobeyed, was cast into captivity, and stands condemned. In Jesus, human flesh has been perfectly obedient. In Jesus, every temptation to which we have succumbed, every sin we have committed, was resisted and paid for. Jesus did only satisfy the Law actively, doing what we cannot, He also satisfied God's eternal justice, which demands that every sin be met with eternal wrath and condemnation. By Christ's perfect obedience of suffering and dying for our sins, God is reconciled to us.

That is what St. Paul says immediately before today's epistle: **"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"** (2 Cor 5:18-21).

That is what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. He has not only resisted the devil for Himself, but for us. And He has crushed the serpent's head with the wood of His cross. The first Adam failed to shield his wife from the devil's attacks. The second has laid down His very life for His bride. The Son of God endures humiliation, not just in being subject to the disgusting temptations of the devil, but even to the point where He who is holy and Life itself suffers all the wrath for sin and death. That is the basis of our reconciliation with God.

St. Paul then goes on to quote the prophet Isaiah: **"In a favorable time I listened to You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You"** (2 Cor 6:2/Is 49:8). Those are the words which the Father says to the Son. In giving up His very life, Jesus offered the perfect, favorable and acceptable sacrifice for sin. And so He was helped, delivered, by the Father. He was relieved after the temptation by the ministry of angels. Luke tells us that in the agony of Gethsemane an angel appeared to strengthen Him. And having made perfect satisfaction for sin, having shed His blood to satisfy divine justice, making us favorable and acceptable to God, He was raised from the dead, saved from the corruption of the grave.

This is the time of God's favor. The day of salvation which Christ has won for us is here today. **"Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** Here you see Christ teach you how to resist the Evil One when he comes knocking on the door of your heart to sell his sinful wares. Here you see Him as the example of resisting the siren call of the world. But even more you see your Lord defeat the enemy for you. The One who resists in the wilderness is the One who goes on to die for your weakness and sins. His victory over sin, death, and grave are announced and delivered to you today.

**"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain"** (2 Cor 6:1). You are not dead. You are not in the clutches of the Devil. You are baptized. The words of the Father said of Jesus at His baptism are said of you. You belong to Him, claimed in Christ. You know where He speaks, where His Word that cleanses and releases you from sin is preached. You know where He gives His gifts to strengthen and preserve you in the true faith, in body and soul.

Knowing this, where it is that God delivers His grace to us, as Christians we devote ourselves to these things. We value and treasure, we avail ourselves of them. Not because it is meritorious, that God saves us because we have done the work of reading the Bible, or we receive the Sacrament frequently and that makes God like us. These things do please Him. They gladden His heart. Because this is where and how He is at work. To strengthen us in His word and faith. To enable us to grow in grace and holiness of life. To ward off sin, temptation, and the devil. It is where He delivers to us what we most need: His favor, His salvation which He has accomplished for us in His Son. Here is where the Fall's curse is undone, and Satan's rule ends.