

The First Sunday of Lent

with the Great Litany

Readings

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

†In the name of the One: Who was. Who is. Who is to come.

As of Friday, Today's blizzard was supposed to start at 7 a.m. Then it was supposed to start at 10. Then noon. Now it's 1 p.m. At this rate, by tomorrow snow will still not have fallen and the blizzard will be scheduled for next Tuesday. I want you to know that a remarkable number of churches in our area cancelled worship services *before* the storm moved to the afternoon. Which means some of you are here not only because you are faithful, but because you are stubborn. God can work with both.

And you came on the right Sunday, because we just sang the Great Litany. The oldest prayer in the English language, nearly five hundred years old. And we asked God to deliver us from *everything*. Not just the theological biggies: "from all evil and wickedness; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil." We also asked for deliverance "from lightning and tempest." So if you were looking for a prayer that covers eighteen inches of snow, we're your church.

Now, the Collect we prayed a few minutes ago asks something audacious. Listen to the adverb: "Come *quickly* to help us who are assaulted by many temptations." Quickly! The person who wrote that prayer thought it perfectly appropriate to ask the immortal, invisible, most blessed, most glorious one to *sprint*. And like the Collect continues, "as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find

you mighty to save." Save me! Save us! The writer of this Collect not only wants God to run, but to run directly to me.

So two things are happening there. First: God already knows your particular weaknesses. Not weakness in general or in theory. Yours. The crummy little things that you keep doing. The ones you're ashamed of. God is not surprised by any of it. That's the first thing. God is not surprised. And second: the prayer assumes that God *wants* to save you. Not that God might be coaxed. Not that God is on the fence. The prayer takes for granted that the Creator of heaven and earth is already hotfooting it to get to you..

That's the gospel in a sentence. Not that we have to crawl toward God through forty days of miserable self-improvement, but that God is madly dashing toward us, already knowing exactly who we are and still is mighty to save.

Last Sunday after our joint service, more than a hundred of you showed up for breakfast. A hundred people who could have gone home, who instead stayed to sit with each other, break bread, tell stories, laugh. Nobody assigned them a Lenten discipline. Nobody required their participation. They just wanted to be together. And I thought: *that's it*. That's the church. Not forty days of grim endurance but community. Joy. Bread shared on purpose.

So here is your Lent. You're about to walk out into a snowstorm. The wilderness is real: it's literally right outside our door on Pompton Avenue.. But you don't go alone. The Spirit who drove Jesus into the desert is the same Spirit who gathers us here, who sang that ancient prayer through our mouths this morning, who is mighty to save and who is coming quickly towards us.

Go in peace. And for heaven's sake, drive slowly.

The Great Litany

O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth,
Have mercy upon us.

O God the Son, Redeemer of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O God the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful,
Have mercy upon us.

O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, one God,
Have mercy upon us.

Remember not, Lord Christ, our offenses, nor the offenses of our forefathers; neither reward us according to our sins. Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and by thy mercy preserve us, for ever.

Spare us, good Lord.

From all evil and wickedness; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil; and from everlasting damnation,
Good Lord, deliver us.

From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice; and from all want of charity,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From all inordinate and sinful affections; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From all false doctrine, heresy, and schism; from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and commandment,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from plague, pestilence, and famine,

Good Lord, deliver us.

From all oppression, conspiracy, and rebellion; from violence, battle, and murder; and from dying suddenly and unprepared,

Good Lord, deliver us.

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and submission to the Law; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation,

Good Lord, deliver us.

By thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the Coming of the Holy Ghost,

Good Lord, deliver us.

In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our prosperity; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,

Good Lord, deliver us.

We sinners do beseech thee to hear us, O Lord God; and that it may please thee to rule and govern thy holy Church Universal in the right way,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to illumine all bishops, priests, and deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of thy

Word; and that both by their preaching and living, they may set it forth, and show it accordingly,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to bless and keep all thy people,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to send forth laborers into thy harvest, and to draw all mankind into thy kingdom,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give to all people increase of grace to hear and receive thy Word, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred, and are deceived,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give us a heart to love and fear thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee so to rule the hearts of thy servants, the President of the United States (*or of this nation*), and all others in authority, that they may do justice, and love mercy, and walk in the ways of truth,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to make wars to cease in all the world; to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord; and to bestow freedom upon all peoples,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to show thy pity upon all prisoners and captives, the homeless and the hungry, and all who are desolate and oppressed,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the bountiful fruits of the earth, so that in due time all may enjoy them,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to inspire us, in our several callings, to do the work which thou givest us to do with singleness of heart as thy servants, and for the common good,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to preserve all who are in danger by reason of their labor or their travel,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to preserve, and provide for, all women in childbirth, young children and orphans, the

widowed, and all whose homes are broken or torn by strife,
We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to visit the lonely; to strengthen all
who suffer in mind, body, and spirit; and to comfort with thy
presence those who are failing and infirm,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to support, help, and comfort all who
are in danger, necessity, and tribulation,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to have mercy upon all mankind,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give us true repentance; to forgive
us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and to endue
us with the grace of thy Holy Spirit to amend our lives
according to thy holy Word,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to forgive our enemies, persecutors,
and slanderers, and to turn their hearts,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand; to
comfort and help the weak-hearted; to raise up those who
fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to grant to all the faithful departed
eternal life and peace,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to grant that, in the fellowship of
[_____ and] all the saints, we may attain to thy
heavenly kingdom,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us.

Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
Grant us thy peace.

O Christ, hear us.

O Christ, hear us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Kyrie eleison.

Christ, have mercy upon us. or

Christe eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Kyrie eleison.

*The Officiant concludes with the following or some other Collect
Let us pray.*

Almighty God, who hast promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in thy Son's Name: We beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ear to us who have now made our prayers and supplications unto thee; and grant that those things which we have asked faithfully according to thy will, may be obtained effectually, to the relief of our necessity, and to the setting forth of thy glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.

Amen.