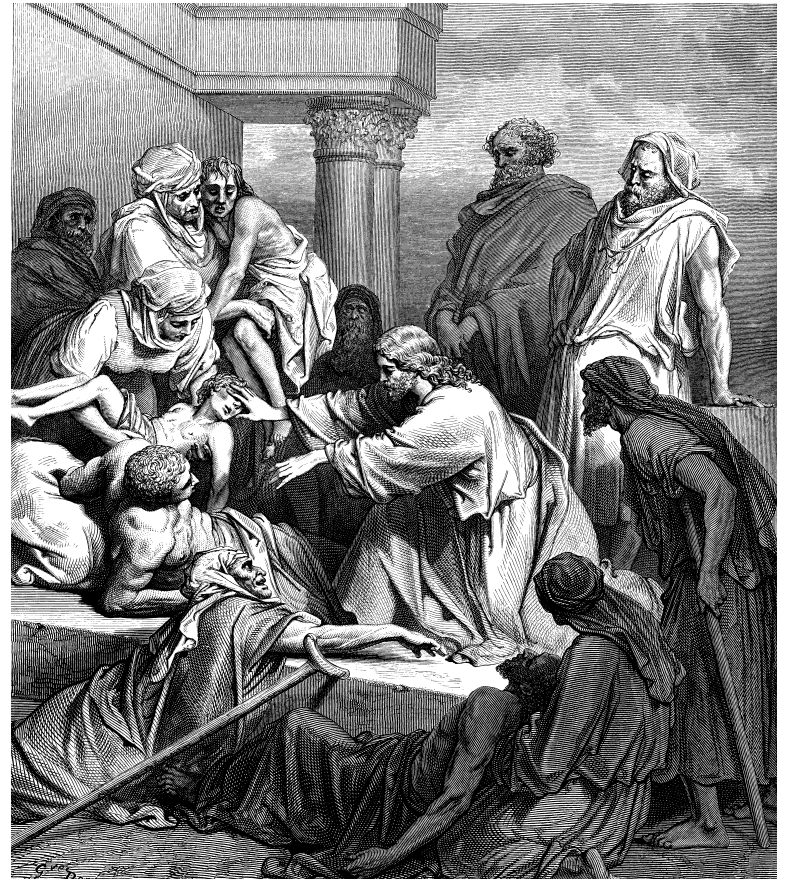


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FROM THE PROPER FOR TRINITY 13

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 10:23-37 (NKJV)

Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.”

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”

So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.”

And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’

So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?

And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which Thou does promise, make us to love that which Thou does command; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Today's text presents us with an example of misguided zeal for personal gain masquerading as zealousness for the Lord. This type of behavior usually involves self-deception as well as the misleading of others, either blatantly or subtly, as to one's love for the Lord and His will. In chapter ten of 2nd Kings we see Jehu attempting to consolidate his control of the northern kingdom through craftiness, intimidation, and manipulation. Jehu uses vague words in a veiled threat of war to get what he wants while maintaining plausible deniability. The problem with all such behavior is that, while one can use the defense of plausible deniability when speaking and/or defending one's actions before men, such a defense utterly fails before the throne of the holy and righteous God.

We are, at times, tempted to use God's Word to justify our actions when they are, in reality, less than fully aligned with Him and His kingdom. The Lord is not deceived. We, as Christians, are called to live as Christ, for we are His Bride, the Church. This fact always demands the utmost honesty and adherence to His Word and will—a Word and will that offer forgiveness for all sins and invite us to be His sons and heirs to His kingdom. May we not fall into the sin of deceiving ourselves and others with veiled words and deeds but, instead, rejoice in the rare privilege of being called purely by grace to confess our Lord and Savior before a dying world of deceivers and deception.

It is not possible to actively rebel against the Lord and His will without suffering the consequences of such open defiance of the God of heaven and earth. The judgment against such rebellious behavior is not always so immediate and clear as it is in our text, but the historic narrative before us makes it clear that God will not be mocked indefinitely without consequence. In spite of all of King Ahaziah's political and military maneuvering he was still doomed to rule for only a year, for the Lord had ordained his downfall through his going to visit Joram.

The Lord controls all things, even the goings on of those who rebel and reject Him, His Word, and His will. We often are troubled by the apparent earthly success of those who seem utterly opposed to God, but must always be brought to remember that the Lord remains in control of all things and nothing takes place that does not work for the good of those who are His called ones. Though we may be troubled in this life while others seem to enjoy relative comfort and success, the Lord continually blesses and upholds us. The events of this earthly life should not be thought as indicators of God's love toward us or others; God knows all things and uses all to fulfill His divine will to bless us, no matter how much humans and the devil attempt to derail His plan. Christ died for your forgiveness, you were called into His eternal life through Holy Baptism and, unlike the best laid plans of sinful men, the uncertainties of this world cannot change that eternal reality.

A glimpse of being “in the world but not of the world” in ancient Babylon: Daniel and his companions would serve the king and the nation (as the Lord gave counsel through Jeremiah), but they would not become one with them. In particular, their sustenance would in no way be seen as coming from the king, but the Lord Himself would be their Provider, and keep them from lagging due to their clear separation from the king's dole.

It is easy to get caught up in the result of this: at the end of ten days, they appeared fairer and fatter than those who had a portion in the king. Some would take this as a guarantee that if they behave similarly, they will have similar results. Such thoughts, of course, can lead one to great despair if his life is not so perfectly blessed as this. Yet, Daniel himself had *no* such thoughts: as we will see at the fiery furnace, the only thought is “I will not dishonor the Lord who saves me!” It would not matter whether they were blessed in so open a fashion or allowed to starve: the right thing was to be done, anyway, as doing anything else would be trivializing the salvation that the Lord was providing.

When Daniel and his companions and coworkers were found ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers, this sort of thinking was at the heart of their wisdom and understanding: they would be beholden to none above the Lord and, therefore, they were able to speak and do His Word without regard for the potential mocking of others.

In Jeremiah's epistle, the Lord tells His people to live in Babylon just as He would one day tell them to live throughout the world. They are not to be consumed by their grief over having lost Jerusalem for the time being, or having lost the City of God on Earth, but to treat the land where they would dwell as being exactly where He would want them for that period of time. There they would experience what was necessary for their return to Judah to be one of true joy: not mere happiness at the recovery of land, but joy born of repentance, returning to "their" country with a full appreciation that it was only theirs by God's grace.

In the mean time, they were to serve as exemplary citizens, going about all of the normal duties of their vocations—planting, harvesting, eating, raising children and giving them in marriage, and so on, all the while praying for the city of those who took them into captivity, until the seventy years should be fulfilled and the "expected end"—the end promised by God—would be upon them, and they could rightly cry out to God for their captivity to end. (See Daniel 9).

So, too, we are settled in the midst of those who, by and large, have no use for the pure teaching of God's Word, yet we are to pray for them and be God's blessed people among them, longing, yes, for the time of our exile's end, but waiting patiently, as well, knowing that for the sake of Christ our end is certain: blessed life everlasting in the land above that He has promised!

In this chapter we hear of the consecration of the righteous king Joash. This was brought about by the priest Jehoiada taking courage (or more precisely receiving courage from the Lord) and gathering in Jerusalem the heads of the father's houses. This resulted in a covenant or pact of allegiance being created between Joash and these respected heads of clans.

The entire chapter centers around the gathering of Joash and these fathers of houses at the house of the Lord by the priest Jehoiada to bring about Joash's consecration as king—an event performed with great concern about God's will and adherence to His precepts. The Levites were given certain tasks that their clan had been called to perform in the Temple, and each person was directed to fulfill his duty with concern about God and His statutes. This concern continued after the consecration of the new king with the destruction of the altars, images, and house of Baal. The people had been led away from the Lord by the previous leader and now this new king was to introduce a new age, within which the people would be encouraged to return to the Lord.

In the turmoil of our current age it is easy to become distracted by false idols that promise security, or to become overwhelmed by the uncertainty of life, but God never rests and always directs the affairs of His creation for the eternal benefit of His chosen. Never fear this world, or crave its sinful pleasures, for you are not *of* this world. Your home is with God in His eternal kingdom, and this life is but a short journey.

This text chronicles a great tragedy involving apostasy and treachery, as well as an example of one repaying evil for good. Joash, who had been a good king of Israel during the period of the divided kingdom and actually was instrumental in rebuilding the house of the Lord, turns his back on God in his later years. This falling away and eventual rejection of the Lord and His Word resulted in God likewise turning against Joash for his many evil deeds.

We should take heed of the message contained in this divine record of how easy it is for one to go from follower of the Lord to opposer of the Lord. Ultimately, what led Joash away from God was his willingness to listen to earthly counselors over and above the counsel of the Lord. This sad reality should lead us to be compelled by our faith to act as the apostles did when they were brought before the High Council and admonished to preach no more concerning Jesus and His ministry. When confronted and threatened, the apostles declared before that very council of men: “We must obey God rather than men.”

With the stark lesson preserved in today’s narrative from 2nd Chronicles may this always be our response when confronted with such a choice. Christ has died for our sins and, through His atoning death, has secured for us eternal life purely by grace. May this most blessed gift always move us to join Joshua in proclaiming before the world “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Today, we see the result of Zedekiah’s faithlessness. As he refused to endure the mocking that would come with his speaking peace with Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon came against Jerusalem with his whole army and besieged it. Zedekiah fled, but, just as the prophecy said, the Chaldeans caught up with him, judged him, killed all of his sons (so there was no heir to the throne), put out his eyes, bound him with chains, and carried him off to Babylon. The city, as the Lord foretold through Jeremiah, was soon engulfed in flames, and the people were carried off into exile.

Interestingly, unlike Zedekiah and his playing at mercy, the captain of Babylon’s guard showed true human mercy to the poor of Jerusalem, letting them stay behind and take over the vineyards and fields that belonged to those going into captivity. Unfortunately, though, what looked like a good and merciful thing in man’s eyes was exactly the opposite of what the Lord wanted His people to experience: they *all* were supposed to be taken captive, so that they all would learn what genuine mercy is and receive that mercy from the Lord. Refusing His will that they should be exiled, these remained and did as the Babylonian guard said they could...and ended up dying for it.

As in 1 Corinthians 11, where Christians were dying through their abuse of the Lord’s Supper lest they ended up condemned with the world, God’s mercy doesn’t always look merciful, but we confess that His wisdom is beyond human wisdom and His will toward us is always good, so that we are willing to suffer it being done.

In the midst of the doom and gloom Jerusalem brought upon itself, we are brought back to understand just that: this is not what God desired, but what the people and their leaders asked for by their constant refusal to do as the Lord had said: they rejected His Word, rejected His promise, rejected His grace, which is what the rejection of His Law shows. They set up their abominations in the Temple, rather than having all things there be such as God appointed; their doing this indicates their rejection of the sacrifices that He had ordained, a denial of their need and a denial of the Christ to whom those sacrifices pointed, a denial of the grace and forgiveness that He desired always to bring them at the altar.

Yet, again, the Lord does not want this to be the final state of things: as His will for them was, from the start, for their salvation and their living as His people, so would He gather those about to be scattered, bring them back, and restore all of their former privileges. Moreover, He would make them of one heart and one path by means of an everlasting testament.

St. Paul declares this fulfilled in Jesus. When he bids us in 1 Corinthians 1:10 all to speak the same thing, it is because we all have as our one path Him who alone is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life”; the Christian Church is the Israel of the New Testament, and what the Israel of the flesh ran away from after their return from exile has now been given unto us.

This text presents the record of King Amaziah, who reigned in the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the rule of Joash in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Amaziah demonstrates a concern for the Word of the Lord by the exemption from punishment of the children of the murderers of his own father. This is cited as an example of the new king’s desire to do what was right.

In his war with Edom, Amaziah demonstrated his ability to lead Judah’s forces to victory. Unfortunately, this lead him to overestimate his military prowess to the end that he issued a foolhardy challenge to the king of Israel, who crushed him as a wild beast tramples down a thistle. Apparently this disastrous defeat so enraged his subjects that “they made a conspiracy against him” and “slew him.”

This text is rich with lessons about humility and not thinking too highly of oneself, for this sin-induced arrogant attitude is what leads to Amaziah’s downfall. Ultimately, this was only a symptom of the much greater disease that is innate sin itself, the fruit of which is rebellion against, and eventual rejection of, God’s Word and will...a lack of humility often leading to other open manifestations of the will of the flesh. Christ entered into this sin-filled world to take on Himself all the righteous judgment against such sinful behavior and the sinful nature that underlies it. We need only repent of such rebellion and rejection of God, trusting that all has been paid by Christ. Thus are we returned to our Redeemer in the humility that is itself produced by the message of grace and the atoning blood of Jesus.

The long reign of King Azariah of Judah (52 years), who is also known as Uzziah, is allotted no more space than his contemporary (Jeroboam) in Israel received. In his case, too, there is no record of his political and military activity, even though he extended the borders of Judah so that the territory of the two kingdoms at this time approximated the size of David's empire. The emphasis is more on Azariah's adherence or faithfulness to God's Word. That being said, it is still noted that during his reign the people continued to offer sacrifices on the high places contrary to God's statutes.

This chapter also contains records of a number of kings of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and contrasts these kings and their apostasy with King Azariah's relative faithfulness. This drives it home that God blesses those who are turned to Him and desire to keep His precepts. Likewise, it shows that God is not concerned with your military conquests, political victories, or economic superiority as much as He is focused on your love of Him and trust in grace He shows to those He chooses to bless. The Old Testament often associates longevity with the blessings of God and His guidance shown to those who seek Him and His will. Azariah, though not perfect, strove to do what is right and pleasing in the eyes of the Lord and this text acknowledges that God saw this as good—as evidence that he trusted in the coming Messiah. Judah prospered not because of the military, political, economical prowess of her leadership, but because the Lord graciously blessed her out of His divine love.

King Zedekiah continues in his self-serving, man-pleasing ways, even though trying to do this means his constantly displeasing some segment of man and being to his ultimate ruin. Still refusing the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah, Zedekiah answers those who would silence Jeremiah (that is, silence the Lord) with the same thought as we hear from Pilate's mouth when the Jews tell him that Jesus has transgressed their law: "You see to it." "Do as you wish with him; the king shall not harm you for it," Zedekiah craftily says to them.

Allowing them this, though, brings Ebed-melech to protest against these men as having done evil. The king (like Herod in the slaying of John the Baptizer) thinks that he can't 'go back on his word' (that is, repent!), so he tells Ebed-melech to take enough men to protect Jeremiah and himself and to bring the prophet back into the prison court. Coming to some semblance of reason after seeing all of this, the king meets with Jeremiah to ask what, really, would be required to save the people of Judah. When Jeremiah tells him, the king refuses, fearing that he will be mocked for going out to make peace with the enemy, though he realizes that this is God's own Word that he is refusing and seeks to spare both the prophet and himself the misery that they would experience if anyone knew what Jeremiah said, thus ordering Jeremiah not to tell the princes.

The king thus continued to sin willingly and we see the result: Jerusalem was taken.

Zedekiah was a player with words: he would not hear the Word of the Lord that He sent through Jeremiah, because he would not hear the Word that had been sent through Moses, and when asked to show mercy, he sought only to honor the *letter* of the prophet's request. This king adored the showy display, the mere *appearance* of righteousness, and the pleasant tales of those who would prophesy only happy times for his nation, but Jeremiah spoke of the path that must be walked before the time of joy would come.

Zedekiah would be a fan of today's "name it and claim it" prosperity preachers. They bring a 'gospel' of wealth and healing for 'real Christians' in this life, setting their hearers up for disillusionment and despair when cross and trial come to them or, just as bad, a trust in such blessings as indicators of their Christianity that they overlook their constant need for Jesus, for repentance. When one looks at earthly blessings as the sure sign of his salvation, he is focused on something that may not always be present, but to have a right and true faith there must be a foundation that is constant—not only for any particular individual, but for every Christian in all times.

That constant is, of course, the Word of Jesus' life and death in our place, the Word that has washed us, the Word that is fed to us, bringing forgiveness with Christ's Body and Blood...the Word that speaks honestly to our sin and to our lives in this sinful world, providing the remedy that cheers us.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 17:11-19 (NKJV)

Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

The Collect

Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Judah was falling into terrible decline spiritually, so God sent Isaiah as a warning to them. The contrast between the powerful and living God, on one hand, and the decadent people and dead king, on the other, couldn't be more stark. Isaiah cannot stand before this holy and almighty God—and he knows why: “I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”

This wasn't just empty rhetoric on Isaiah's part—He lived among a hopelessly decadent people—and Isaiah's message to them will be: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” God has hardened them. His judgment has overtaken them. In their perversion they become more perverse. In their hardness they become more hard.

When we hear these words spoken upon the Hebrews, do we not hear judgment spoken upon our own land in our own time? Isaiah's message perfectly fits the Western world today. Each generation becomes progressively harder, more dull of hearing, more blind, and it seems so with exponential rapidity and intensity. There is no escape. There is no happy ending for this generation.

There is but one Hope. There shall be a remnant among the ruins. There will be those who return to their God and are healed. This remnant is those whose trust is in Christ. Only *they* are not hard, dull, and blind. We thank God that—by grace alone!—we are those about whom our Lord said, “But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.” Lord, may we always be so. Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. Luke 7:11-17 (NKJV)**

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

The Collect

Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth, and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

In today's reading, Jeremiah reflects on his 23 years of Ministry. He has been faithful in passing on the words the Lord has given him to speak. He has repeatedly told the people of Judah the same message—that they turn from their idolatrous ways. Countless prophets before him have also proclaimed the same message, but the people have not heeded the message. Therefore, God will provide the necessary rebuke—using the instrument of Babylon to invoke it. For 70 years there will be misery—characterized by God in the reading as “Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.”

But at the end of the 70-year period, there would be restoration for Israel—and punishment for Babylon. The kingdom that served as God's instrument of chastisement did not do so out of obedience to God's commands. Their lone desire was to conquer—and God merely used their evil for His own good purpose.

How unfortunate it is that we, like Judah of old, must learn such long and hard lessons. There is constant evidence in our lives of rebellion against the God who has given us so much. On the other hand, we are so fortunate, as was old Israel, that God is patient with us. He seeks to rebuke, not destroy. He desires repentance, not vengeance. Therefore, no matter what comes our way in life, we know that God is using it for the grand and good purpose of His Church at large, and for the salvation of the individual believer.

In the midst of sin and the decay of a society we can take heart: God's kingdom is on solid footing. It's foundations are laid with a plumb line's precision. God's kingdom is stablished and eternal.

The prophets experienced the decadence and social decay that we experience. It is a comfort to know that, and certainly a comfort to know that our God is above the chaos, unworried and almighty. Kings make proclamations, issue commands, considering how the rulers of other lands will react; God makes His proclamations and issues His commands without consulting kings—He has no need! When one has a God like that, one can be fearless when addressing kings or high priests!

When Amos was told to go away and stop causing dissension, he could respond in a shockingly defiant way because it was the Word of the Lord behind his prophecy. It makes a big difference whether one is giving his own unfounded opinion or is speaking nothing more and nothing less than God's own words!

Amos brings no health and prosperity message; he could never have a successful television program: he's too depressing. Amos does not sound like many of the preachers we hear today, but, rather, his shocking prophecies are powerful and confident: “Your wife shall be a harlot in the city; your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword.” We also can be shockingly confident when we have the Word of God behind us. As Luther said before the emperor, “my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. Amen.”

“Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

Ahaz seems to be motivated largely by a desire to secure a safe future. In order to do this, however, he sells his nation into vassalage to Assyria...and sells their souls into bondage to false gods (in this case, Baal).

Consider the abominable things this king does because of this: “He made his son pass through the fire.” In other words, Ahaz sacrificed his own son as a burnt offering to Baal. He “burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.” That is, he worshipped these fertility gods in direct opposition to the Lord. Then, he looted the Temple of the Lord to pay off his pagan master, and built altars like the Assyrian altars. Urijah the priest then practiced divination on one of these altars. Everything was turned upside down! These are not the acts of a man who grudgingly ingratiates himself to a superior: Ahaz truly embraced paganism—he had fully given himself over to it. Instead of trusting the Lord to defend himself and his nation, he trusted Tiglath-Pileser, and became, thereby, an idolater; the rest of it is just the growth of that idolatry.

An idol is whatever, instead of the Lord, we put our trust in. Once Ahaz started putting his trust in one idol, the rest easily followed. As soon as we put our trust and hope in presidents, presidential candidates, political parties, or sports stars, we create idols. They may not *seem* as bad as the idols of Ahaz, but all idols lead astray and bring spiritual death.

Since yesterday’s devotion only touched on King Jehoiachin, it is proper that we give him his “just reward.” We read this in the ending verses of today’s text: “Is this man Coniah [a form of the name Jehoiachin] a despised, broken idol—A vessel in which is no pleasure? Why are they cast out, he and his descendants, and cast into a land which they do not know? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD: ‘Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; For none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.’”

You can hear the desperation of the prophet in these verses, lamenting not only the actions of the king, but the deaf ears of all the land. The passage is capped off by a judgment passed on directly from God. How harsh are the words, but how appropriate as a consequence for the godless actions of the king. We read of this also against Jehoichin: “Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother’s name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.”

There can be nothing worse than to have your sole legacy recorded as having done “evil in the sight of the LORD.” May we desire to hear God’s legacy on us as “well done, good and faithful servant.”

Following the death of King Josiah, the kingdom of Judah becomes quickly unraveled. We learn that one of Josiah's sons, Jehoahaz, lasts but 3 months on the throne. Egypt then hand picks Judah's next king and changes his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim. Clearly at this stage, Judah is nothing but a vassal state of Egypt.

This is because Judah's spiritual condition is abysmal. We learn this from the book of Jeremiah, as his prophecies were read to King Jehoiakim: "And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth."

But times were about to change yet again. In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign, Babylon put an end to the temporary rise of Egypt. While doing so, Babylon also extracted tribute from the weakening kingdom. But pride would not allow Jehoiakim to remain subject to Nebuchadnezzar, and he foolishly rebelled against the powerful king, bringing on a siege of Jerusalem itself. He was replaced by his son Jehoiachin, whose reign lasted but 3 months.

It's easy to see in this narrative how fast the end was coming to the once mighty kingdom of Judah. Her spiritually vacuous attitude was ultimately her demise. May we learn from Judah's mistake, and never take the gift of being God's chosen people for granted. The consequences of rebellion against God are far greater than an earthly exile from a holy land. Indeed, it is eternal banishment from God's Holy presence.

With regard to Israel, God "rejected all the descendants of Israel," and "cast them from His sight." Most ominous is that final statement: "So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day." This is when the people of God went from being "Hebrews" or "Israelites," to being "Jews," because only Judah was left in the land. Yet, we see that God will cut off even His own after a certain time.

There is nothing that says that a people, even God's own, cannot be cut off in their sin. In the mysterious wisdom of God, there is a point at which enough is enough. He will no longer tolerate sin or hold back His wrath.

How can any people in history read this account and not fear for themselves? We read of perversions in our land that are the equal of these abominations in 2 Kings. We have homosexual—even "transgender"—clergy in "mainline" churches. This land is soaked in the blood of millions of aborted babies. The fear of the Lord is practically unknown. How long will He hold back His hand?

Yet, St. Paul tells us of a remnant: "At this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Romans 11:5) God does cut off some who were attached to His people, but He always reserves a remnant for Himself. All that calls itself the Christian Church will not survive. Not all peoples that call themselves "God-fearing" will endure. But there will be a remnant that lives eternally—those who trust in Christ alone—and we pray that we may thus be numbered.

Today we see the beauty of faithfulness and orthodoxy. Hezekiah is contrasted with the kings of Israel, who were idolatrous and wicked. Hezekiah did not adopt pagan practices, nor did he sacrifice his children to Baal. In fact, he got rid of the pagan practices that had infected Judah. “He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made.”

This last deed is interesting because it was not from a pagan source. God had commanded Moses to make the bronze serpent so that when the children of Israel looked upon it they would be healed. (Numbers 21:4-9) This symbol was a type of Christ: Christ was lifted up on a pole for the healing of the world. The Reformed like to cite 2 Kings 18:4 as an argument against images, particularly the crucifix. But, really, this verse supports our position. The object itself was not an idol: God had commanded it. It *became* an idol when people started worshipping the thing rather than the God it pointed to. This is true with all imagery, be it statuary, painting, or stained glass. If one venerates the objects rather than the one the objects point to, they are idols. We Lutherans, instead, use art as an aid to focus the mind on Christ and His Gospel. This is the proper use of images.

Orthodoxy brings its own blessings. The orthodox are not blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. They are stable and their lives reflect that stability...and, above anything else, they find eternal life.

Yesterday’s devotion ended on a sad note of Law. God had pronounced judgment on the nation of Judah, largely due to the long and idolatrous reigns of kings Manasseh and Amon. It seemed that nothing would stop the downward spiral of these dark latter days of the Southern Kingdom.

But, God granted there to be one last good reign prior to the Babylonian exile. Amon’s son, Josiah, became Judah’s king and reigned for 31 years. When he was but 20 years old, Josiah literally warred against the empire of idols that his father and grandfather had built. In today’s reading, the chronicler gives a vivid picture of how deep the purges went.

So Josiah turns things around—and includes the whole nation (and surrounding region) in his purification. Amazingly, during the “cleaning up process”, they discover a section of Scripture that had been lost. And as Josiah heard these words for the first time, he tears his clothes in grief and anguish. He realizes and confesses how great is the abomination that his people have committed.

Without the perfect benchmark of God’s written Law, we are left to our own standards of what is “good enough” or “bad enough.” Our lives become something we judge as “pretty good,” or “not so bad after all.” Unlike the days of Josiah, all of us have free and unlimited access to God’s Word. We are without excuse—as God’s Word is but a few feet away on a bookshelf or table. May we diligently “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the truth of God’s Word—that marks us not only as sinners, but as ones for whom Christ died.

Just one chapter ago in 2 Kings—yesterday’s reading—King Hezekiah was granted 15 more years of life. During that extension, he promised to use that time wisely in worshiping his God and passing on his faith. Unfortunately, whatever was passed on to his son was of no avail. King Manasseh had much going for him. He had a God-fearing father who was also the reigning king. By all rights, he could’ve—and should’ve—carried on the legacy of his father with ease. But today’s reading tells us otherwise: “And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put My name.’”

So not only did the new king worship false gods, he set up idols in the Lord’s own temple. As a result, God pronounces judgment on the nation of Judah. In sweeping and decisive language, God says: “I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.”

God is a patient God, but His patience cannot be abused. We can never assume that, in the end, God will “give in”—and swing wide the doors of Heaven for everyone. May we always take sin deadly serious—and never cheapen the gift of grace.

Unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah doesn’t put his trust in powerful princes, but in the Lord for his defense. Sennacherib of Assyria was genuinely powerful, conquering many cities and heading a great empire. But the Lord humbled him before the gates of Jerusalem.

If you’ve ever wondered about the historicity (historical accuracy) of the Bible, hear Sennacherib’s own account of the story:

Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms and by the might of my power I took 46 of his strong fenced cities; and of the smaller towns which were scattered about, I took and plundered a countless number. From these places I took and carried off 200,156 persons, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mules, asses and camels, oxen and sheep, a countless multitude; and Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent escape...Then upon Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver, and diverse treasures, a rich and immense booty...All these things were brought to me at Nineveh, the seat of my government.

This event was also recorded by Herodotus and Josephus. Sennacherib didn’t mention the angel of the Lord and his army’s disarray, but it is why his army scattered and went home. The Bible is accurate in every way.

THE HOLY GOSPEL St. Matthew 6:24–34 (NKJV)

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

“Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

“So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

The Collect

Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

King Hezekiah had become ill—even to the point of death. He prayed fervently that the Lord would grant him more time on this earth. His motivation for a longer life was a noble one, as recorded in Isaiah 38. There we learn that the king wishes to have more time to praise his God—and to pass on his faith to others.

God, in His mercy, granted Hezekiah’s wish, as He instructed the prophet Isaiah to tell the king: “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. ‘And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.’”

Hezekiah was even granted a spectacular sign that ensured the prophet’s words were true. God made the sun to stop and go back for a short time. God had performed a similar miracle with Moses and his leprous hand—and with Gideon and the fleece. He would provide a similar endorsement with Zechariah and his speech in the New Testament. God, in His omniscience, is fully aware of the weakness of His people. God, in His mercy, condescends to that weakness—“shoring us up” at just the right time. May we always give thanks that we have such a God—who knows, loves, and acts on our best behalf.