

“But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face...”

In Deuteronomy 18:18 the Lord God promised that He would raise up for Israel a Prophet like Moses, in whose mouth He would put His Words and who would speak all that the Lord God commands. After our text announces that Joshua took over for Moses after his death, it tells us that there was no prophet like Moses that had arisen after his death. Therefore, the prophecy in chapter 18 does not refer to Joshua.

It in fact refers to the New Testament Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ. The name Joshua means “Jehovah is salvation,” but the true Joshua, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one true and only Savior of the world. He fulfills the Law of God for us. The Law was given through Moses, but the Prophet promised by the Lord God, who would arise after Moses, fulfills the Law broken daily by us. He then takes our sins upon Himself and endures our punishment on the tree of the holy cross.

As we enter into Passiontide and our focus shifts from our sins and our breaking of the Law to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us give thanks for the Prophet who has arisen for us and wins for us forgiveness, life, and salvation by His death. He alone bestows such blessings upon us through the faith created by the Holy Ghost with the Means of Grace.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MARCH 4–APRIL 6, 2019

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The Calendar

March 3	Quinquagesima
March 6 (W)	Ash Wednesday
March 10	Lent 1—Invocavit
March 17	Lent 2—Reminiscere
March 24	Lent 3—Oculi
March 25 (M)	The Annunciation
March 31	Lent 4—Laetare

FRIDAY, APRIL 5: DEUTERONOMY 28:15-68

LAETARE

Just as yesterday we heard of the blessings that the Lord God wishes to bestow upon His faithful people, today we hear of the curses with which God threatens to punish all who transgress His commandments.

On account of our sins we certainly deserve every last one of these curses that the Lord God promises through the lips of Moses for the congregation of Israel's disobedience. We can even see the effect of such sin on the world and in the Church. The Church is attacked by the wickedness of the world, which does not want the Church to even be in the world. Within the Church the attack and curses continue. Those who claim to be Christians preach and teach things as God's Word that He never said; they only want to teach the vagaries of this world to lead men astray from the truth.

The good news for us, however, is that all of these curses listed in our reading our Lord Jesus Christ endured in His Body on the tree of the holy cross. He took the curses demanded of us and bore them on the cross for us. In return, He gives us all the blessings that He procured for enduring the curses we deserved. We receive forgiveness, life, and salvation, and He received suffering and death. Thanks be to the Lord Jesus for enduring our curses!

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When we are faced with the tragedy of our sin or the consequences that sin produces in this life and world, we often find ourselves in sorrow and despair. It is hard to lift up our countenance when faced with the grave realities of sin in ourselves and in this world.

The Church is under constant attack by this world. At times it seems that we are fighting a losing battle. Our countenance falls and fails to be lifted up again. But Moses in his final address from today's reading gives us hope. This reading is filled with all of the blessings that the Lord God promised to deliver to His people. These promises were made to the congregation of Israel, but these promises and blessings are also for you.

The Lord God desires only good for you. Certainly He can provide for us earthly benefits: protection from our enemies, daily bread and sustenance, good weather, good government, good neighbors, and the like. But our Lord God is even more gracious to us in that He provides for the needs of our soul. He has sent His only begotten Son into our flesh to fulfill the Law of God, which we break daily, for us. He offers up His life as a ransom for us, enduring our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. Our sin and shame have been taken upon Himself so that we no longer need to bear it. Therefore, do not sorrow, but rejoice!

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” Israel began with every intention of fulfilling God's Law, and that intention is admirable. In tomorrow's reading we will see Israel fail by making and worshiping the golden calf. But Israel was full of sinners, so the vow was impossible for the nation to fulfill. There is no one who never sins and always walks perfectly in the Law of the Lord. Even if someone were to outwardly do all the Law required, that person would still fall short because of the sinful thoughts in the heart.

But our Lord is rich in mercy. He sent Christ to do what Israel, and we, could not. All the Lord had said, Christ did and was obedient, even to the point of death on the cross. He is the only one to do what Israel said they would do, fulfilling God's Law externally and in the heart. Jesus loved God the Father and His neighbor perfectly. God applies this perfect righteousness to sinners when they believe the Gospel, that in Christ we have a gracious God who atoned for all of our sins.

We cannot do all the Lord has commanded. But Christ has, and His merits are yours by faith. Because you are righteous by faith, you can strive to walk according to the Ten Commandments, both in outward actions, and the thoughts of your heart. You don't do this to earn God's favor. You have that already by faith. You do this out of love for the God who has graciously done all things for you.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Look how quickly Israel replaces the true God with an idol! When Moses descends the mountain he burns with anger, burns the calf, grinds it into powder, and puts it in Israel's drinking water. By this Moses teaches them, and us, repentance. Israel's idol must be utterly destroyed, lest they return to idolatry. By making them drink the water with the burnt gold in it, Moses makes Israel taste the bitterness of their idolatry lest they forget their sin and return to it.

We are continually making idols in our hearts. We exalt some created thing to god-status whenever we begin to trust that that created thing will deliver us from hardship or provide us with comfort. Money. Relationships. Job. Family. Our talents and abilities. How often do these become the god in our heart so that we trust them for good things?

Through the preaching of the Law, God grinds our idols into powder and makes us drink them. The Law says we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and condemns us for fearing, loving, and trusting created things instead of God. Thanks be to God for the bitterness of repentance! He creates faith in us so we taste how bitter our sins are, sorrow over them, and look to Christ for mercy. And God has promised to forgive each and every one of our many sins. Our Father enlivens our souls with the sweet tasting Gospel of His Only-Begotten Son, taking away the bitterness of our sins. "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103).

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Throughout the forty years in the wilderness the congregation of Israel was preserved from starvation and thirst through the grace of the Lord God who sustained them in their wanderings in the desert. Even in Egypt the Lord God protected the Israelites as He sent plagues to punish and destroy the Egyptians.

The people of Israel would go into the Promised Land and be the arm of the Lord God, punishing and destroying the nations living there on account of their unrighteousness. As we heard in chapter 9, it was not on account of the righteousness of the people of Israel or because they were better people; it was because of the wickedness of the nations of Canaan that Israel was given this land and the other nations were to be destroyed.

This new land would also feed the congregation of Israel. But now, instead of the Lord God giving His people food and drink through miraculous means, they would receive a land which produced food in natural ways; the people would be blessed by the Lord God on account of their faithfulness to His Word.

On Sunday we heard the reading about our Lord Jesus feeding five thousand men, plus women and children, who on account of their desire to hear His Word were in the wilderness with no food. Once again, the Lord provided bread from Heaven for His people and satisfied their hunger. He satisfies our spiritual hunger for forgiveness by offering to us His very Body and Blood in bread and wine.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Moses was instructed by the Lord God to put the tablets containing the Law of God, written with the very finger of the Lord God, into the Ark of the Covenant—the Mercy Seat of the Lord. This was placed within the Tabernacle of Meeting in the Most Holy Place.

This room was entered only once a year, when the high priest would atone for his sins and his sons' sins with the blood from the sacrifice of a young bull, and atone for the sins of Israel with the blood from the sacrifice of a young goat (Leviticus 16). He would sprinkle the blood from the young bull seven times on the east side of the Ark of the Covenant to atone for his sins and his son's sins, and he would do the same with the blood from the goat for the sins of Israel. So then, with blood the sins of both the priests and the laity were atoned for. The Law of God, which the people broke continually, was covered with the blood of sacrifice to atone for the sins of all.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the new Mercy Seat to which all the faithful, as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), may approach, not just once a year, but every day. In His Body He contains the fulfilled Law of God. In His Blood we have the once-and-for-all-time sacrifice that atones for the sins of the whole world. Those who cling to this new Mercy Seat in faith receive the absolution that is promised in Him.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

By their idolatry Israel broke the covenant. The Lord is no longer obligated to go with them into the Promised Land. Everyone removes their ornaments so that their appearance matches the humility and penitence in their hearts. Yet Moses is bold to approach God and remind Him of His promises. It's as if Moses said, "You said I've found favor in your sight. You've said this nation is Your people. You can't abandon Your people." The Lord hears Moses' plea for mercy and promises His presence will go with them into Canaan. He even grants Moses' request. Moses can't see God's face, His bare divinity and glory, but He promises to declare to him His goodness.

Today we enter the penitential season of Lent. Like Israel, we are to repent of our sins, humbly confess them, and remove the ornaments of pride which adorn our hearts. Our idols are not calves of gold, but they are idols nonetheless. We must admit that God is not obligated to go with us through this life or lead us into the promised land of everlasting life.

But it is also a season to earnestly hear God's promises and confidently pray that God would remember them. He has promised to forgive every sin when we believe that for Christ's sake we have reconciled God. He has promised to never leave nor forsake us. In Christ we see the goodness of God.

We pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In yesterday's reading Moses asked to see God's glory. He was asking to see God in His essence and bare divinity, to which the Lord replied, "You cannot see my face; for no man shall see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). St. John writes in John 1:18, "No one has seen God at any time." Creatures cannot see God, especially sinful creatures, and live. But the Lord promises that He will cause His goodness to pass before Moses. Moses sees the Lord's back parts, but not His bare divinity and glory. By this God shows that He is to be seen in human form, that is, in the incarnation of God the Son in the fullness of time.

In today's reading the Lord fulfills His promise and causes His goodness to pass before Moses. What is His goodness? The Gospel. The Lord is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." This is what Christ offers to all who trust the promise of the Gospel. He also proclaims that those who reject the gospel are not justified. He will visit the iniquity of unbelievers upon them because they do not flee to Christ for mercy and forgiveness, but reject Christ and remain under condemnation.

As we go through this Lenten season, let us not seek God's bare divinity and majesty, which would only destroy us if we looked upon it. Let us instead seek God in Christ, true God and true man, where He has promised to be merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Moses, before he leaves the congregation of Israel and before they go in to take possession of the land, gives final instructions to the people of Israel. In short, he reminds them of all the rebellious things that they did in the past forty years.

One thing that Moses keeps mentioning is that he fasted forty days and forty nights. What was he doing during these times of fasting? He tells the people of Israel that he was pleading on their behalf to the Lord God. He was pleading for them that the Lord God might not destroy them, but that He would show mercy to them.

We began the season of Lent with our Lord Jesus Christ fasting for forty days and forty nights. In that battle with the devil--the accuser of mankind's liability to the Law--the Lord Jesus acts as our Mediator. He defeats the devil in the wilderness and overcomes the temptations of the devil. He defeats the devil in that which we are unable to do.

The Lord Jesus intercedes for us to the heavenly Father. He endures our trials and temptations. Where we fail daily and often, He triumphs and wins the victory. Now, He leads us into the Promised Land of eternal life as we cling in faith to the promises that are taught us by His Holy Ghost through the preached Word and administered Sacraments. He who denied Himself bread for forty days and nights has now become the Bread of Life for us, feeding us through Word and Sacrament.

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Being tested or put through trials and tensions in life is not something that is welcomed by mankind's flesh. Humility is taught through such tensions, but again, this is something that man's pride-filled, sinful flesh despises. Luther had a term regarding man's flesh that properly summed up why these are struggled with so adamantly; he called it "presumed righteousness." In other words, man's fallen flesh, which is not fearing, loving, or trusting in God, presumes itself to be righteous, and in such a state turns in on itself and prefers total independence. Any help or guidance—especially from the truth of God's Word—is completely despised.

As Luther describes it, man's flesh, pridefully assuming that there is nothing wrong with itself (presuming to be righteous), goes on to believe that all things should then always work out to its benefit, and nothing should work against it. God, however, allows trials for everyone, and in the case of His baptized children, He specifically allows tests, intending to keep them drawn to Him as the only source of true life.

God's 10 Commandments say, "Do this!" Yet, they are not done. That truth alone is humiliating, but the trials, tensions, and humility that God allows to be experienced in life are further intended to prove that man's flesh can never be trusted more than God. Thankfully, God's Word of Gospel—that Christ has fully atoned for sin and merited full forgiveness—ever says, "Believe this, for it is already done!" Through God's grace man truly lives by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord!

Pray Psalm 66

When Moses comes down Mt. Sinai from his forty days, his face shone with the radiance of the Lord. His countenance was so bright that the Israelites were afraid to look at him. So he wore a veil to cover the glory that radiated from him.

In 2 Corinthians 3 St. Paul writes about the Jews, "Their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:14-16). When people read the Old Testament without seeing Jesus Christ in those pages, it is as if they're reading it with a veil covering their face. They read it, but understand nothing. Jesus says to the Jews in His day, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). The only thing that takes the veil away is true faith in Christ. Those who believe in Christ read the Old Testament and begin to see Christ's person and work throughout its pages, sometimes in prophecy, sometimes in foreshadowing of individuals and institutions like the tabernacle.

When the Old Testament is read apart from faith in Christ its only ministry is condemnation, because it teaches us the Law which shows us our transgressions. But when read through faith in Christ, it becomes a ministry of life, showing us our gracious Lord.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and wash them with water. You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to me as priest.”

The book of Hebrews demonstrates that Christ Jesus is our High Priest. Aaron and his sons foreshadowed Christ’s high priestly ministry in which He would offer up prayer for His people and sacrifice Himself upon the altar of the cross to atone for the sins of the world.

Aaron and his sons are also prefigurings of every Christian. As Aaron and his sons were washed, so too all Christians have been washed and reborn in the laver of Holy Baptism. Like Aaron, the holy garment of salvation--which is Christ’s righteousness--clothes us. Like Aaron we are anointed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism and set apart from the world as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). John wrote that Christ “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (Revelation 1:5-6). Christians are priests of God, though our priestly duties are different than our High Priest’s duties. Christ offered Himself as expiation for every sin every person has ever committed. Christians do not offer such a sacrifice. We offer our bodies as living sacrifices, striving against sin our members. We offer the “sacrifice of praise,” that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15), because of His work as our High Priest.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

It’s easy to read through these Ten Commandments as only simple words, or even to continue to have them remain as just knowledge from catechesis. Knowing the words has its place, but God delivered them with intention. The Law is intended to do important work: to reveal sin.

Here are brief examples of the depths that these Commandments can reach when more fully meditated upon:

1st: Have I imagined God fits more in line with my own depiction, apart from Holy Scripture?

2nd: Do I pray absent-mindedly or inattentively?

3rd: Has learning the Word of God become boring, cumbersome, or meaningless to me?

4th: Have I showed respect and obedience to civic leaders (including praying for them)?

5th: Have I murdered anyone with my mind through destructive thoughts?

6th: Have I condoned sinful relationships by not speaking out?

7th: Have I stolen through lazy work?

8th: Do I defend others against false accusations?

9th & 10th: Have I been content with what God has given me?

More questions could be supplied for each, but this displays how meditation upon God’s Ten Commandments keeps them the mirror that they were intended to be. However, the biggest benefit comes as those who carry out such mirrored self-examination are mercifully driven to flee from the judgement seat of God’s Law to the Mercy Seat, which is Christ Jesus and His fully atoning merits for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Thanks be to God for supplying the only way of rescue by grace alone, because of Christ’s merits alone, through faith alone!

The godly desire of Moses is to have the Lord choose another overseer to take his place to shepherd the congregation of Israel. As Scripture interprets Scripture, this blessed understanding of the need for a shepherd's (pastor's) oversight is found throughout God's Word. Jesus, being the one raised up as the prophet like Moses, expresses God's firsthand concern regarding the spiritual care for the lost. In Matthew God proclaims, "But when [Jesus] saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His Harvest' " (Matthew 9:36-38).

St. Paul reveals this same godly concern as he exhorts, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). St. Peter, as well, writes in his Epistle: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

The same care that God expresses through Moses, Jesus, Paul, and Peter continues to be the godly care for souls today. Thanks be to God for His placement of under-shepherds (pastors) who stand in the stead of the Good Shepherd, Christ Jesus.

Pray Psalm 23

This text emphasizes the unique relationship between God and those He calls to worship and serve Him and His house. The tribe of Levi is chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel to facilitate the public worship and ministry ordained by God. The tribe of Levi is further honored by being called to serve the ordained priesthood (Aaron and his descendants). The theme is that the service at the tabernacle may be performed only at the express invitation of the Lord, under the penalty of death. While those called to worship and those who minister in God's house were divinely authorized persons, they are not to deviate from divinely authorized means.

Similarly, the New Testament Church is referred to as a nation of priests, so all Christians are set apart to worship and serve in God's house. Likewise, there are also abundant warnings against both approaching Christ's Means of Grace inappropriately, and being innovative with the Lord's Gospel.

In this Lenten Season we rejoice that our sins are forgiven purely by grace, but dare not abuse the grace of God by thinking we have an artistic license to do with God's Means as we wish. God, through Word and Sacrament, has provided more than adequately for His Elect regarding how He wishes to come to us, and have us come to Him. Let us rejoice in God's chosen Means of Grace and the ministry of the Church He has graciously established.

We pray: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

It took three days for the nation to get fully mobilized, likely because of the huge numbers of people in the tribes of Israel. The description of this mobilization resembles that of an army of antiquity, and thus is an image of Israel as the Lord's army on the march, with the Lord at its head. The image is brought to mind of Israel as a people victorious over Egypt and moving triumphantly toward the Promised Land.

In the time of Lent we repentantly look upon our sinful failure to fully engage in the triumphant march toward the promised land of the new heavens and the new earth, knowing Israel likewise failed. God provides all that His people need to achieve what He wills for them, but we are weak—and though He offers order for our lives, we so often choose disorder by straying from the gracious path laid out by Him. God's graciousness is further demonstrated in the invitation extended to Hobab, the son of Reuel the Midianite, to become part of the Lord's elect.

The tabernacle and the holy things within it were carried in the middle of the assembly so that God's house was in the midst of the camp even when the camp was on the march. The reference to the ark emphasizes the fact that the real guide of Israel was the Lord who dwelled above the mercy seat of the ark. He directed the course and cadence of the march through "the cloud."

We pray: Thank You Lord for mercifully dwelling among us and graciously guiding our lives in a similar way by Your Means of Grace. Amen.

"So Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, "If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that I must speak"?' "

God brings Balaam to hold fast to the Word of the Lord amidst the temptations of worldly wealth. Jesus would also say, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). God knows the weakness of man's sinful flesh, and it is the proper teaching, preaching, and practice of His Word that maintains the good fight against such a risk.

Once God's truth is foregone, all is lost. In these last days many pastors simply forgo faithful teaching, preaching, and practice to give the people what their itching ears want to hear, all for the sake of worldly wealth (namely, self-comfort or self-security). Even though Balaam would eventually relinquish properly upholding the Word of the Lord, at least at this point he demonstrated proper proclamation as he prophesied about the conquering Christ to come—the one who would "destroy all the sons of tumult."

Thankfully today, through pastors brought to properly carry out Word and Sacrament ministry, Christ continues His prophetic role, for it is Christ crucified who conquered not just the sons of tumult, but through His fully atoning merits He conquered sin, death, hell, and the devil! How joyous to know that God keeps a remnant for Himself to carry on His truth to future generations!

Within the words spoken by King Balak there is a superstitious technique utilized requiring that the curse be delivered from a place where the one cursing (in this case Balaam) has to see his victims. This is revealed right from the start. Look at the conclusion to chapter 22 where, just before the first prophecy, King Balak takes Balaam “up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people” (22:41). As the attempts fail it can also be noted that King Balak tries other heights: “to the top of Pisgah,” and again “to the top of Peor.”

Not fearing, loving, or trusting in God, sinful flesh easily falls into the same superstitious line of thinking when it comes to the desire for power and control. An example would be the self-made belief that says, “If I do this or that just right, or if I abstain from this or that sin, then I will make appeasement and earn a blessing.” These are, however, only merits for a false god of self design. “My will be done” is the deep-rooted, hidden cry of the old Adam.

Thanks be to God that He has brought His Word to be preserved through the ages. This brings God’s Will to be done among us, breaking and hindering every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature (including trust in superstitions). Through God’s Word Christ Jesus is revealed as the only one to make true, full appeasement (atonement) for our sins. He is the Mercy Seat to whom sinners must flee in faith for refuge and the blessings of true life!

Pray Psalm 34

“But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

Does not this verse sum up the continual whining of God’s people from Genesis to Revelation? How often do you lament about how tough a life you have, how unfair it is that you must face the trials of your life? How often do you moan about having nothing at all but these Means of Grace (Word and Sacraments) to look at? Complain, complain, complain.

Although the march through the wilderness lasted a whole generation, only a few incidents along the way are recorded. Almost all of them are variations of the same theme: Israel complains and revolts against God’s guidance. The historic narrative of the people of God is not an epic of national heroism; it is not the glorious record of a people willing to suffer hardship for the sake of freedom.

We complain often about how bad we have it, and our Lord who was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification graciously listens. It has been that way from the beginning—and so it is with us. It is only because the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, because His mercies are new every morning, that we remain His true children and do not turn back to the slavery to self, world, and the devil.

We pray: Almighty, heavenly Father, allow us to see Your abundantly gracious hand in all things, in every support of body and soul, as the fourth petition of our Lord’s Prayer proclaims. Amen.

What is the specific sin that causes Aaron and Miriam to be called to task by the Lord? Is it not a violation of the Eighth Commandment in their attack on Moses and his wife? This sin, like all our sins, can ultimately be traced back to that original sin in the garden. It goes back to mankind's desire to rebel against God and His will for us, rather than be His beloved children.

Though the sin of Aaron and Miriam was forgiven by an abundantly gracious Lord, there were temporal ramifications that had to be dealt with. This reality must also be faced in our lives when we sin, for being forgiven by God or absolved by the pastor does not necessarily translate into immediate removal of the consequences of our sin in the here and now.

Aaron serves as an example of how we should deal with our own sin in that he does not make excuses or try to shift blame for the sin. He immediately and completely confesses the sinfulness of his and Miriam's behavior. He turns to Moses in humility with a repentant request that Moses bring their fallen state before God with a humble plea of forgiveness through grace. Aaron had faith that, though they had been rebellious and foolish, the Lord was merciful and long suffering toward His beloved children. It is also worth noting that Aaron does not forget his place as priest, for his request is for Miriam especially to be redeemed from her judgment.

We pray: Lord, through Your holy Means of Grace may we always be drawn closer to You and be ever thankful to come repentantly before You as Your servants. Amen.

Each March 25th the Church celebrates the Festival of the Annunciation, the conception of Christ within Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26–38). This is an important miracle, as God takes on human flesh for the sole purpose of meriting full atonement for sin, that whosoever believes in Him would be forgiven and saved. Gabriel was sent to rightly proclaim (annunciate) God's Word to Mary which brought about the incarnation of Christ Jesus. Mary rightly confesses God's truth through what is known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

In Numbers, God reveals the seriousness for which He expects His Word to be rightly spoken (or annunciated), proving so by miraculously speaking through a donkey. This very event would later be re-emphasized through the inspired writings of the New Testament, reiterating the point of properly proclaiming God's Word.

St. Peter's second Epistle reveals the reality of false prophets: "...even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies..." (2 Peter 2:1). Then, reflecting upon the text from Numbers, he is inspired to describe the depravity of false teachers:

"They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (2:15-17).

As He has in the past, may God's warnings continue to bring about the faithful proclamation (annunciation) of His Word. Through Christ's merits His mercy endures forever!

Pray the Magnificat

After the Lord delivered the Canaanites to Israel to utterly destroy their cities, then the people complained about the Lord's providential care for them: "And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.'" For this sin, the Lord sent the fiery serpents among them.

The people repented and turned to Moses to intercede for them: "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us." Moses had prayed for the people and the Lord said to him: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."

This deliverance pointed to the greater salvation which Christ came to bring to all who believe in Him. As Jesus said to Nicodemus: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:13–16).

We pray: "O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen."

The use of spies is common practice throughout history, and Deuteronomy 1:20-23 indicates that this directive of the Lord was in response to the people's request. Thus the very sending of the spies was an expression of God's grace toward His people who lack adequate faith. We can offer various theories about why the Israelites were concerned or cautious about entering the land that God had promised them, but it is far more important to consider the lesson about our own lack of faith than to speculate about their reasons for the sin of doubting the Word and will of the Lord God.

The record of the spy mission describes a land that fulfills the Lord's promise of an abundant territory, for a single grape cluster is so massive it requires two men to carry it between them on a pole. The Lord is faithful even when we are faithless; He is gracious even when we are rebellious; He is loving even when we are angry. Often we insist on spying out, investigating, testing the faithfulness of God in our lives, though the overwhelming evidence is that He is always more faithful than we deserve.

The Israelites had experienced deliverance from Egyptian slavery, merciful protection by the column of fire and smoke, as well as the crossing of the Red Sea, and bread from heaven before this incident—but they still had their doubts about God's faithfulness. We have experienced delivery from slavery to sin and the devil by Baptism, the merciful forgiveness of Absolution, plus the true bread of life in Communion—and we too still doubt God's loving faithfulness.

We pray: May the Holy Spirit mercifully strengthen our faith this Lenten Season. Amen.

The treachery and horrible lack of faith portrayed in this text is truly sad, and it demonstrates how evil such behavior is. Through these words and deeds the leaders of the people are able to lead the people away from the Promised Land and God. The first part of the spies' report was truthful, but the goodness of the land was offset by their faithlessness that lead them to think the inhabitants of the land were too powerful for Israel to conquer. In their disbelief they failed to acknowledge that God fought for them and would faithfully fulfill His promise.

Their words became exaggerations and distortions meant to terrify the people and discourage them from receiving the wonderful gift of grace the Lord offered. They claimed the inhabitants of the land were descendants of Anak, referencing the Nephilim, in hopes of evoking fear by implying they were more than mere mortals in some way. They implied that Israel could not hope to hold its own with powerful, experienced warriors of such great stature. These leaders were entrusted to deliver a faithful testimony of what was discovered in the territory, and chose instead to confess a lie meant to mislead the Lord's people.

This is similar to what we see so often in Christianity today as leaders compromise, falsify, and deny the true (orthodox) teaching (doctrine) of Scripture. They are entrusted to deliver a faithful testimony of what is discovered in the Word of God, and false teachers choose instead to confess a lie meant to mislead the Lord's people. Their confession in word and deed misdirects and discourages people from faithfully receiving the Lord's blessed Means of Grace in truth and purity.

We pray: Heavenly Father, through Your abundant grace may heterodoxy never be found destroying true faith among us. Amen.

The sin of Moses and Aaron at the water of Meribah passes before our eyes so quickly that it might be easy to miss the enormity of the transgression. The people grumbled against the Lord, and Moses and Aaron came before the Lord to intercede on their behalf. The Lord said to Moses: "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

But Moses did not do as the Lord commanded; rather, when Moses and Aaron had assembled the congregation, Moses "said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank." Moses spoke to the people, not the rock, and he struck the rock, which he had not been commanded to do.

In 1 Corinthians 10, St. Paul declared concerning the Israelites in the wilderness: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." In Numbers 20, Moses did not do that which the Lord commanded, and attributed the Lord's work to his own hand. On account of this sin, Moses and Aaron would not enter the promised land. The Lord is the Savior of His people; those whom the Lord calls are His instruments.

We pray: "O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen."

As we read in yesterday's text, "Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun.' Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped" (16:46–48).

Today's reading demonstrates that Aaron was precisely the one who was chosen for this purpose. Moses did as the Lord commanded concerning the twelve rods of the houses of Israel, and it was the rod of Aaron which the Lord caused to be fruitful so that it "sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds." It was then that the people understood the deception which Korah had tried to work in their midst; the fruitful branch was a testimony to the word and will of the Lord. The miracle demonstrated that it is the Lord who orders all things and whose Word grants life. The Lord called Moses and Aaron to serve Him and to intercede for His saints before Him.

We pray: "O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen."

God's Word teaches us why the people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years: the people sinned against the Lord by rejecting His Word. They did not trust in the Lord's promises and feared that the One who delivered them from Pharaoh and brought them through the Red Sea on dry land would not save them from the inhabitants of the land. Therefore the Lord declared: "And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection."

The Lord did not reject Israel; forty years in the wilderness was God's merciful answer to the prayer of Moses. The Lord pardoned their sin (v. 20), but still the way into the promised land was closed to that generation: "...they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it." The perversity residing in the hearts of many of the people was manifested again when, having been banned from the land for forty years, many of them perished at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites when they tried to force their way in to the land before the appointed time. Contemplating their sin, we remember why we are taught both to pray for daily bread and that God's will would be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

We pray: "O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen."

The words of Korah and his followers seem all too familiar: “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?” The congregation’s holiness was not in doubt; Korah was challenging the call of Moses and Aaron. In this, Korah’s twisting of the Word is akin to that which transpires when some seek to misuse the word of 1 Peter 2:9—“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”—to assault the calling to the office of the ministry.

The saints need to be on guard against those who seek to twist the Word. False teachers seek to confuse the congregation in the pursuit of their own power over against the office which the Lord has established in the midst of the congregation. In the rebellion of Korah, the whole congregation was in peril, for the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” It is thus that those whom the Lord has called intercede on behalf of the congregation: “O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?”

We pray: “O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”

Korah’s rebellion exposed wickedness within the hearts of many among the people. When the Lord ended the rebellion in a way which had never been seen before—the earth opening up and swallowing those who were in rebellion—and when fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 who sinfully offered incense before the Lord, the perversity which reigned in the hearts of many among the people rose up into defiance.

“On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord.’” The assertion is a lie which flows forth from wicked hearts. What the whole congregation had witnessed was something unprecedented; and, if Moses and Aaron could do such a thing, what madness would it be to rebel against them? But the Lord, who thus punished the rebellion, would have punished the whole congregation for continuing to challenge Moses and Aaron. It is only on account of the intercession of those whom the Lord had called that the congregation was saved.

The Christ intercedes with the Father on behalf of His saints, and He sends ministers in His stead and by His command to bring His Word and Sacraments to His people, and to bind and loose their sins, according to His will.

We pray: “O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.”