

Lent 1

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 58

Second Lesson: Matt 6:1-18

Homily

Christians are forever quoting the words in the middle of our second lesson.

We call those words the "Lord's Prayer".

As Anglicans, we recite those words at least once in every Prayer Book service.

They are the words He Himself gave us as a model for all our praying.

Have you noticed, however, that we do not recite this prayer exactly as it appears in our Bibles?

If you've attended worship in Protestant churches, you have very likely stumbled as those around you said somewhat different words.

They'd be saying,
just as the King James Bible does,
just as even Roman Catholic Bibles do:
*"forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors",*

This, in fact, is exactly the way the Latin has it

in the traditional Roman Mass

but we say,

*"forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us".*

These are words of very similar meaning.
but why the difference?

Somehow, in a flash of brilliance,
those who translated the Prayer into English
used the words that come in Our Lord's comments
right after the prayer itself.

*For if ye forgive men their trespasses,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
But if ye forgive not men their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

This is the only line of the prayer
that Jesus seems to have needed to comment on.
Not only did He teach us to ask forgiveness,
but he taught us to forgive,
taught us in fact to pray
(if we will think closely about what we say)
that we be forgiven only if we forgive,
asking, in fact that our forgiveness
be made to wait until we've learned to forgive.

In our choice of translation
we highlight Our Lord's explanation.
This is a serious and solemn thing to pray.

Our Prayer Book applies this in a very practical way.
On page 85, after a discussion of the exclusion of
"an open and notorious evil liver" from Communion,
.we read this:

*"The same order shall the Minister use with those,
betwixt whom he perceiveth malice and hatred
to reign;
not suffering them to be partakers of the Lord's
Table,
until he know them to be reconciled.
And if one of the parties, so at variance,
be content to forgive from the bottom of his heart ...
and the other party
will not be persuaded to a godly unity ...
the Minister ... ought to admit the penitent person
to the Holy Communion, and not him that is
obstinate. ..."*

This is Lent,
and our first order of business in this season
is the honest examination of our conscience,
the laying out of all our sins before the Lord

(in the presence, if it may be,
of one of His priests),
the seeking of forgiveness,
and of help for a change in our living.

We are pretty good at detecting
all the obvious sins,
the things we know are wrong.
Often we run through the Ten Commandments
and check off those places we seem to have failed.
That is a good thing, and we should be doing it,
but what about those sins we convince ourselves
to be only right, even righteous,
those things we consider virtuous,
even when Our Lord has told us otherwise.

Do we hold a grudge
against someone that has wronged us?
After all, wrong is wrong, isn't it?
:"I've been sinned against.
God hates sin, shouldn't I?"
"Look at what HE did!
How can anyone forgive THAT?"
"It's too much to ask. I just can't forgive."
But One who was absolutely innocent
lay against a beam as they nailed His hands to it, and
said.
"Father, forgive them."

Another, named Stephen,
as the rocks continued to pound into his flesh,
cried out as he died,
"Lay not this sin to their charge."

*Forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

Let us pray.

Father almighty,
who loved us enough to send thy Son;
Jesus, who loved us enough to die for our sins;
Holy Spirit
whose love guides us in the right paths;
Loving God, fill us with that same forgiving love,
grant us grace to love those who hurt us,
to pray for those who despise us,
to forgive with all the fullness
of the forgiveness that we ask of thee,
through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Lent 1

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Ecclus 2

Second Lesson: Romans 7:14-25

Homily

It's Lent.

We are going to spend the next few weeks thinking about sin and temptation, about holiness and redemption.

Lent isn't pleasant.

It's not supposed to be.

What's fun about confessing our sins?

What's optimistic about admitting that we really can't be good enough?

It really is a painfully ego-bruising thing.

Just look at that pitiful second lesson from Romans, chapter seven.

Can you imagine a successful leader going on the way St. Paul did?

How many elections does a politician win by explaining,

"I'm not good enough, and I can't be."?

How many would hire a job applicant

that talked that way?

Ever hear a sports star proclaim that he just isn't good enough?

But it's true.

We aren't and we can't, and, if we're honest with ourselves, we know it.

St. Paul was honest enough and bold enough to lay his deep inner struggles right out front.

"I want to do right," he says, "but I don't. I try hard, but not hard enough. Just when I think I'm making progress, I fall right back into sin."

We criticize parents, preachers, leaders, when we catch them saying one thing and doing another.

"Do as I say, not as I do," we hear, and we take it as an example of hypocrisy, but isn't that

just what we catch St. Paul saying here?

He's confessing weakness.

He's describing a life that is far short of the mark, and he finally lets out a pitiful wail,

*"O wretched man that I am!
who shall deliver me ...?"*

This man was certainly forthright
 about reminding his hearers of their sins.
 He thundered out frighteningly
 in his letters to Corinth,
 about the serious abuses in that church,
 and yet, he remained a struggling sinner.
 Is that hypocrisy?

It's been said that people who live in glass houses
 shouldn't throw stones.
 Well, that's quite true, unless
 the glass is all pitted and needs to be replaced,
 and a truck loaded with prepaid new glass
 is sitting outside.

St. Paul says that he's in the same boat with us.
 We're all dreadfully flawed,
 and we can't be fixed without first being broken.
 It's just as we ourselves said a few minutes ago:

*"We have left undone those things
 which we ought to have done;*

*And we have done those things
 which we ought not to have done;
 And there is no health in us."*

We are sinners.
 That is fact number one.
 We can play cover up.
 We can pretend to be better than we are.
 That's what most of us do most of the time,
 and that is hypocrisy,
 or we can admit our struggles,
 and struggle together,
 and cry out for help.

That's our business this Lent.
 We are called upon
 to take a very close look at our sins.
 We are called upon to recognize our weakness.
 We are given an opportunity to cry out for help.
 And we are offered help.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus tells us

*"... if thou come to serve the Lord,
 prepare thy soul for temptation.
 ...Believe in him, and he will help thee;
 order thy way aright, and trust in him.
 ...For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
 longsuffering, and very pitiful,
 and forgiveth sins,
 and saveth in time of affliction."*

and St. Paul cries out,
"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. "

Let us pray:

Lead us, Lord, in the paths of self-examination,
repentance, and sorrow for our sins.
Lead us in our fastings and prayers.
Lead us to the knowledge of thy grace,
the guidance of thy Holy Spirit,
and the promise of everlasting life,
Through Christ our Savior,
who died and rose for our redemption. Amen.

Lent 1

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Jer 17:5-14

Second Lesson: 1 Cor 10:1-13

Homily

Our reading from First Corinthians is St. Paul at his most lyrical ... and his most frightening. He pictures the Children of Israel, called, adopted, and named by the Lord God, led step by step by a chosen and caring shepherd, with many signs and many wonders, on a journey toward a Promised Land. They were fed a common food provided by the Lord. They drank, in the midst of a parched and barren desert, from water that flowed from a cleft rock, a rock that followed them from place to place, and never failed. That rock, says St. Paul, was Christ, the same Christ who called Himself the Living Water. What a wonderful story! What a beautiful picture!

It makes one think of the twenty-third Psalm, everyone's favorite, doesn't it?

But that's not where the Apostle stopped.

He went on:

"But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

He gave us a picture of a bunch of murmuring, complaining, squabbling people, lusting after evil things, falling into idolatry, sexual immorality, and outright rebellion --

people just like us, if we'll be honest with ourselves; and he painted an absolutely frightening word-picture, of a desert littered with corpses.

As we heard from the prophet Jeremiah:

"Thus saith the LORD;

Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,

and whose heart departeth from the LORD."

and as St. Paul continued:

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

This is Lent.

It is time to take stock of ourselves,
time to examine our actions,
and our thoughts, and our intents,
time to repent,
to recognize how wrong we are,
to express our deep sorrow for offending
against what we know to be God's will,
to ask and accept forgiveness,
and to seek direction toward a change of life.

A certain comedian was forever proclaiming,
"The Devil made me do it!"

Is that true?

There is temptation.

Sometimes it seems very strong indeed,
but, as St. Paul went on:

*"There hath no temptation taken you
but such as is common to man:*

*but God is faithful,
who will not suffer you
to be tempted above that ye are able;
but will with the temptation
also make a way to escape,
that ye may be able to bear it."*

If we will ask,

if we will truly desire to follow Our Lord,
if we will attempt to take up our cross
and follow Him,
we can grow in holiness.
We can become saints.

As the children's hymn has it:

*"For the saints of God are just folk like me,
And I mean to be one too."*

*"Blessed is the man," said Jeremiah,
"that trusteth in the LORD,
and whose hope the LORD is."*

May we be so blessed.

O God, father of all mercies, judge of all men,
lead us in the ways of holiness
show us our sins, show us thy mercy,
and bring us at last, by the paths thou hast chosen,
to the life everlasting at thy throne,
where thou reignest, O Father,
Thou and thine only begotten Son,
and the Holy Spirit, both now and unto all ages.
Amen.

Lent 1

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Dan 9:3-10

Second Lesson: Luke 5:33-6:10

Homily

*"O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee,
but unto us confusion of faces.
... O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, ...
because we have sinned against thee.
To the Lord our God belong mercies
and forgivenesses,
though we have rebelled against him;"*

Extracts from the Prayer of Daniel
in the First Lesson tonight,
a prayer especially appropriate
for this solemn season of Lent.
Daniel, in his imagination,
looked into the face of God.
He saw clarity, perfection,
a nature that does not change.
He saw One whose every thought
and every decision
was both right and righteous,

a face infinitely firm
and infinitely stern in its judgment,
a face to bring fear to the hearts of those
-- of us --
who willfully disobey His commandments.
He saw the One whose throne in the temple
filled even the high priests with fear,
with bells on their garments that could be heard
as they ministered
out of sight in the Holy of holies,
with a rope on their ankles
so they could be safely dragged out
if they should cease to move.

God is righteous.
No sin survives in His presence.
In His holiness our unholiness is revealed,
and it is ugly, dangerously ugly.

But in that same Face,
the Face of righteous judgment,
he saw revealed the infinite mercy,
the will to forgive,
the overwhelming love that led the righteous Judge
to send His well-beloved Son
to live, to die, to rise,
to bring forgiveness, to make us worthy,
worthy to stand in awe and love before that Throne.

God is not confused.
 He knows what He made us to be.
 He made us (amazing thought!) in His own image.
 He knows how badly we have marred and distorted
 that image, by our thoughts, words, and deeds.
 He knows that there is no longer any health in us,
 yet His love is everlasting.
 He does not desire the death of a sinner,
 but rather everlasting life and joy.
 He knows what he intends us to become,
 and that is to be filled
 with all the fullness of Christ,
 to shine in His presence as saints
 throughout all eternity.

God is not confused, but we are.
 Yes, we want Him, or so we say, so we think;
 but, just as much, often more,
 we want our own way.

How many of us fail to appreciate the words
 of the song Frank Sinatra so often sang,
 "I had to do it MY way"?
 That is how we think.
 We read in Proverbs that,
 "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,*"
 but we read further that,

"The end thereof are the ways of death."
 We want God, but we don't.
 We want to do good,
 but not if it goes against what we really want.
 We show one face to God when we pray,
 another to men whose favor we seek,
 and another to those we dislike.
 Confusion of faces.

The Lord Jesus, as he walked this earth, saw
 (as we see in the second lesson)
 another kind of confusion of faces,
 a danger that we 'religious people' often face,
 but seldom admit that we are facing,
 As an old preacher said, churches are full of people
 who are so heavenly minded
 that they're no earthly good.
 Our Lord was constantly challenged by people
 who knew they were righteous,
 good religious people.
 They kept the laws.
 They observed all the fasts,
 (the Old Testament equivalent of Lent),
 they were faithful in worship and in study,
 They were a model to the people
 of what righteousness looked like,
 but their religion did not show the face of God.
 They were free to despise those

who did not fulfill those same external standards.
They felt themselves required
to leave suffering unrelieved,
just because the religious obligations
of the Sabbath
seemed to get in the way.
If the Law was kept, they seemed to think,
then love was entirely unnecessary.
Confusion of faces.
God is not like that.
Neither should we be.

Let us pray.

Grant us, Lord, singleness of face toward thee, and
toward the world around us, that we may love thee.
our God. with our heart, soul, and mind, that we may
love our neighbors as ourselves, and so fulfill the
Law of Christ. Open the eyes of our hearts that we
may know our sins, and bring us to forgiveness and
amendment of life. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.