

We bow our hearts in prayer: O Jesus Christ, we humbly pray, keep us in Your narrow way, that when we falter and repent, we may receive Your sacrament, and firmly trust in that blessed food, that we receive Your highest good. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

In this mini season of Michaelmas, the Church considers the great warfare that she is in until the Last Day when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

In the Epistle today, St. Paul says that our battle is not against flesh and blood,

but our enemies are spiritual, and so we must use spiritual armor in order to fight against them.

The devil is a devious foe and uses all weapons at his disposal.

When He tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he had the gall to tempt Jesus even with God's Word.

Thankfully, Jesus saw through his incorrect use of God's Word and overcame the temptations.

But if the devil will use it against Jesus, should we doubt that he would use the Gospel against us?

As you listen to God speak to you from Romans 11:13-24,

consider how it is that you might be tempted by the idea of salvation.

And then consider how it is that you are able to stand against these insidious temptations.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

So how is it that our spiritual enemies use the Gospel to tempt us? In a word, it is arrogance.

It was arrogance that caused the Jews to reject Jesus.

Remember all those parables Jesus told about the invitations to attend a great feast?

The king had invited people already and then sent out his servants to call them in.

But those who were invited were arrogant. They thought they had things well enough.

They did not feel the need or a desire for the king's kindness and so they excused themselves,

or beat the servants and even killed some of them.

How often do you listen to those parables and think, "How foolish! I would never do that!" instead of thinking, "O Lord, have mercy upon me so that I never ignore your invitation"? You see how the devil and even your own sinful nature, can lead you down the path of arrogance even with the gospel itself?

It's not really a direct attack, is it?

You aren't tempted to deny the Triune God or His salvation through Jesus' death & resurrection. In fact, your belief in these truths are used to devious effect.

"Well done! You are grafted into the Tree of Life because YOU have believed in Jesus."

In fact, these **branches were broken off, so that YOU might be grafted in.**

Doesn't that make you feel special... that God chose you from eternity to believe in Him?

There must have been – must be – something special about YOU.

Otherwise, why would God have chosen YOU and not your co-worker or neighbor?

He must have known that YOU would have a good heart.

He must have known that YOU would try really hard to serve Him and please Him.

And what of those others that were broken off. How foolish of them!

"They had it all, but they refused it. Tough luck.

And same goes for my co-worker and neighbor.

They aren't very kind anyhow, not the right material that God is looking for.

Even if I did try to speak to them about Jesus, they would probably ignore or mock me."

But isn't this the same arrogance that the Jews had for Jesus?

They were the special chosen ones. They were children of Abraham, better than the Gentiles.

They had God's law, they were doing things to make God pleased with them.

So when the servants of the Lord came to them, when Jesus Himself came to them,

they thought they were good enough. They ignored, beat, and even killed God's messengers.

When we take pride in our belief in God and of our forgiveness through Jesus,

as if there were something in us, some spark of goodness that God saw in us that He chose us;

When we look down on those who currently do not believe as we do;

When we are content with the good things we do and think how happy God must be with us, this is all human arrogance that militates against the very belief you are taking pride in.

It takes credit, even if seemingly only minutely, in your salvation.

It boasts that you *can believe in Jesus Christ and come to Him by your own reason and strength.*

It no longer relies solely on God's grace and the Holy Spirit's work of giving you faith.

Such arrogance, denies the very belief of Jesus' as your only Savior that you were so proud of.

Of course, there is another kind of arrogance that can get us cut off from the Tree of Life.

This arrogance is just as insidious because it doesn't seem like arrogance at all.

It is the arrogance of disbelief and unbelief, masquerading as humility.

It is the arrogance of one who feels that he is too evil, too unclean, too rotten, too bruised to be part of the Tree of Life.

Who hears God's forgiveness pronounced and says, "that isn't be for me."

Who considers Jesus' death on the cross and says, "that isn't enough to take away my guilt."

Remember what St. Paul said was the reason for being removed from the tree:

They were broken off because of their unbelief.

While our being part of the Tree is completely and utterly by God's grace alone, all to His credit, our removal from that Tree would be completely our own fault.

While **angels nor rulers...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus,** ^{Rom.8:38-39} while they cannot pluck us off of God's tree, they can tempt us to arrogance and unbelief, and our human nature is already prone and hellbent on following these temptations.

The godly response to this then is one of prayer, "O Lord, forgive me and have mercy upon me so that even in the weakness of my sinful nature I never ignore your daily invitation, and keep me steadfast in Your Word."

The Lord's response to your prayer is given you in that same life-giving Word, even in our text. St. Paul says, "**You stand fast through faith,**" that is, the object of your faith: Jesus.

This faith is not something that you have conjured up, but clings to gospel of Christ,

That He, God's Son, came down from heaven and was born of the root and stump of Jesse.

He became man so that He could live the life of righteousness before God demanded of you, a life of perfect humility, trusting not in Himself, but in His heavenly Father for strength.

A life of constant prayer and meditation on God's Word to defend Himself from temptation.

And at the proper time, that life was given up in seeming weakness, and not without prayer and meditation on God's Word mind you, as He suffered there on the cross.

But while it appeared to all the world that this Righteous Branch was cut off and dead forever,

He rose from the dead to give new life to all who are grafted into Him,

to protect them who take shade under the bows of His extended arms,

to give them nourishment in their distresses and strength to overcome temptation

to lavish them with fruit to bear, worthy of God's delight and honor.

It's being grafted into Jesus that you are connected to that **nourishing root** of Jesse.

Though you were once a dead branch off a wild olive tree, the Lord of His own kindness took you and grafted you into Himself through Baptism to give you the richness of forgiveness.

How humbling it is to consider that the Lord has grafted you into Jesus,

even while you were His enemy, arrogantly not believing Him?!

And in that same mercy, He desires to graft others into His Son,

others who currently struggle with the same arrogance that you struggle with,

your co-worker and neighbor, others in this community, in this country, and world.

Should we expect that they are all already inclined to believe? No, why should we? We weren't.

Instead, God gives us everything needed to speak to those around us,

everything we need to provide for those that go out on our behalf,

everything we need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers,

and that their labor would not be in vain.

Should we be surprised that everything we need is Jesus?

Does awareness of your sins keep you from speaking to others of their Savior?

Jesus gives you His body and blood, given and shed for you... and for them.

Does fear of not having enough keep you from generously supporting the work of the Church?

Jesus refreshes you with these His salutary gifts to strengthen you in faith toward Him

and in fervent love toward one another.

Does your strength waver and prayers and meditations falter?

Jesus nourishes and strengthens you with nothing less than Himself, the power of almighty God.

He comes speaking to you such words of steadfast kindness,

“Take, and eat. This is MY body. Drink of it, all of you.

This cup is the new testament in MY blood.”

That as one sitting at the table of such a generous host,

it is only natural to listen and speak to Him in grateful humility,

eager to keep up the conversation through mediating on His Word and in prayer.

Grant this, Lord, unto us all. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria