

Let us pray: *Dear Father, Thou hast bidden me pray; let me not relapse because of temptations.*¹

...as follows in Jesus' name:

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.^(ESV)

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

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God, The Lord would have kept Peter from this shameful denial.

He had warned him, "**Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.**" Matthew 26:34

And He had admonished him later on: "**Watch and pray...**" Matthew 26:41

But Peter wouldn't hear it. He retorted, "**Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You!**" Matthew 26:35

And later that night, Jesus found Peter sleeping, while he could have been praying with Him.

...

Now, we shouldn't deny that Peter had a strong faith when he said that. It wasn't just for show!

Amid a great crowd of soldiers and officers of the temple with torches, clubs, and swords,

he pulls out a sword himself and strikes at a head (but cutting off only the ear of Malchus).

But when Jesus told him to sheath the sword... that He would not be defended in that way,

and instead allowed Himself to be captured (after healing Malchus' ear, no less),

Peter didn't know what to do.

His strong and bold faith in a worldly Messiah... a conquering king... was shone to be a misbelief.

And Peter, like all the others, ran... he fled from His Lord.

...

But still, Peter was drawn to **see the end**, as St. Matthew records. Matthew 26:58

And so, with the help of St. John, he gains entrance into the court of the High Priest.

The fire is warm and inviting. Others are there, but the night's chill has set into his bones...

and all it takes is a servant girl to associate Peter w/ Jesus, "**You also were with Jesus, the Galilean.**"

— Now what an opportunity to confess his Lord as he had done before, Matthew 16:16, John 6:68

Yes, he is **the Christ, the Son of the Living God**... He **alone has the words of eternal life**...

But he assesses the situation and sees no worldly or immediate upside to doing that.

His boldness in "**even dying with Jesus**" waned as his fear & the possibility of death overcame him.

And what is more, if Peter were trying to lay low and avoid attention, he failed.

... His denial attracted more attention.

And though he moved to another location, another servant girl joins in more emphatically,

¹ (Source: <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/#lc-iii-0110>)

“This man WAS with Jesus of Nazareth.”

Peter again denied it, this time with an oath... a sworn statement to confirm his lie.

But the crowd wouldn't let up. The truth was obvious.

He doesn't belong among them... even his Galilean accent gives him away.

Yet still, Peter refuses to be counted with Jesus and calls down curses from God upon himself, commanding God do damn him to Sheol / hell if he were lying... which he was.

But then he remembers... not lying words, but words of truth, spoken earlier... to him... by Jesus.

Now early in the morning, the rooster's crow reminds him of Jesus' explicit words,

“Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

Not words spoken in fear or anxiety, or in anger, or in hatred,

but knowingly and with truth and with admonition to watch and pray.

St. Luke even reports that **the Lord turned and looked at Peter** at this time, Luke 22:61

and so Peter recognizes his fall and **went out and wept bitterly.** Luke 22:61

He had fallen just as greatly as Judas, the betrayer.

2 Corinthians 7:10

And yet our Lord's grace kept Peter, giving him **godly grief producing repentance that led to salvation.**

What a comfort it must have been to Peter to remember another earlier saying of Jesus that night:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Luke 22:31-32

...

Here we sit in the last of our midweek Lenten services before Holy Week.

We've already learned to pray for God's name to be hallowed among us and for His kingdom to come.

We have learned to seek His will and to ask for forgiveness of our heavenly Father.

But in this petition, we are asking for His continued help that we might not cause more offense

to His holy name, either among us who bear His name as Christians, or in the world on account of us.

We're pleading to be free of offenses that would keep us and others out of His kingdom of grace/ glory.

We're begging that His will would reign in our lives — not our own, nor the devil's, nor this evil world's.

And your heavenly Father promises to hear and answer your prayer, as Luther confesses with us,

God certainly tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us

so that the devil, the world and our own flesh may not deceive us

nor lead us into misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice;

A. And so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who has taught us, like Peter, with words of truth.

1. He has taught us: **Watch and pray.... The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.** Matthew 26:41

But like Peter, we can be tempted to spiritual pride (and thus misbelief in untrue things).

Do you believe yourself to be strong in faith as Peter believed himself to be,

and think yourself immune to unbelief, saying to yourself, **“I will never fall away...”**

Yet here we are, by grace. You have returned to hear His words of forgiveness and peace yet again,

not because your faith was strong, but because your flesh is weak and continually falls into temptation.

2. God tells us, **“The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”** 1 Peter 5:8

Aren't we tempted to be halfhearted in spiritual things, and act as if the devil weren't so dangerous?

Having the confidence of Jesus' victory over him, do you treat the devil as if he were a harmless kitten,

and even allow him into your home, to use your idle hands while scrolling social media for hours, or trouble your eyes with worthless TV programming, or movies without any redeeming value? And all the while, neglecting to watch by meditating on His words of truth for barely a few minutes or praying to Him for longer than your before-meal-prayer...
...barely a fraction of the day of what you allow the devil and the world to influence you to their will.

Jesus says, **Beware of false prophets**, ^{Matthew 7:15} yet do you indiscriminately listen to radio/podcasting preachers. People who don't properly understand the distinction between Law and Gospel... or care to, who don't hold all the teachings of the Small Catechism to be their summary of the Christian faith, who would emphasize your works to comfort you and give you eternal certainty, rather than leading you to despair of their value in your salvation. And so we can be susceptible to despair of God's forgiveness all together for our weakness against sin, or be led to believe that there is still something left that you can or should do for your salvation.

The Lord has sent His Son into this world in order to teach us and to lead us away from temptation, but knowledge alone does not save us, nor do our feeble attempts to simply avoid sin, for when you avoid one, how often do you fall into another ... and another.

B. And so the Lord has come also for another purpose: to be your Savior...
to be the One Who took the devil head on in the wilderness... and in the garden... and on the cross; Who when threatened with death...when tempted to avoid such an abominable, God-forsaken death, not only did He not fall away, but submitted His will to His heavenly Father's will that His name would be hallowed and His kingdom of grace could come to you and all people; Who gave Himself up for you, to bear the burden of your falling into temptation time and again; Who spilt His blood to wash idle hands | and purify troubled eyes | and give hope to despairing hearts. And Who, 3 days later, rose again from the dead to give you new life, as we hear from St. Paul,
We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ^{Romans 6:4}

This new, God-given life is your strength to hate sin, to flee temptation, and to seek His salvation. It gives the desire to obey... not to avoid punishment, but for love and appreciation of salvation. And it grows in you a desire to be in constant communication with your heavenly Father, watching... listening to Him as you meditate on His true and holy word, a praying for His ever-present grace and mercy so that you *may still in the end overcome and retain the victory.*

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria