

Sunday of Advent – “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil one.”

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
April 2, 2017
Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:34-23:39*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I always preach, the purpose of Lent is to learn. It is an opportunity to learn about our faith, how to grow closer to God, and how we can become better Christians. Continuing with that tradition, this year’s Lenten Sermon Series is about the *Lord’s Prayer*. Two weeks ago we began learning about the second half of the Lord’s Prayer and the different requests we make to God. We learned that when we pray, we must only ask for what is immediately needed, not worrying about the future. Last week we were reminded about forgiveness and how we must forgive in order to receive it. Today, we will learn about the final request we make to God, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

“And lead us not into temptation”

Sometimes we misunderstand this request because of the words that are used, especially the word, “temptation”. So often we associate it with the ideas of seduction and sin, but this is not what the word originally meant. The Greek word, *peirazein* does not mean to seduce, but to test the strength and loyalty of another. The English word *tempt* comes from the Latin word *temperare* which means “to try, to test” (which is also where we get the word *attempt* from, meaning “try to”).

We see this usage in the Bible, when God tempts Abraham (Gen. 22:1) and when Christ is taken to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1). In both cases, and in reality, temptation is not designed to make us fail, but make us stronger and better. Just as metal for a bridge is tested at its stresses and strains beyond which it is meant to bear, so are we.

We pray that we are not tested because we may fail. We know we are humans and we are weak, and if temptations (tests) happen, we could fail. However, we ultimately want to come out stronger than when we went into that particular situation. When difficulties arise, we must look at them not as forms of punishment brought on by God, but as opportunities to grow in faith and become better Christians, whether it be sickness, loss or even death.

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“but deliver us from the Evil one.”

In this final request, we ask our Heavenly Father to keep us from all evil. We have learned in past sermons that the Armenian word “to save” (փրկել/prgel), originally meant to free, because Christ, our Savior, frees us from sin, death and the Devil.

But what is evil? Two things we must understand: first, in both Greek and Armenian, there is a definite article connected with the word evil. That is to say, it should not be translated as “from evil”, but “from **the** Evil one”. The Armenian should say, “ի չարէւ/ee charen”, but often we leave the “ւ/n” off and thus, not defining what or who the evil is. This is significant because Christ is talking about Satan and makes it known that evil is not some abstract principle or force, but an active, personal power in this world.

Second, in Hebrew, the word is Satan, means adversary. In Greek, the word is diabolos, which means separator (and where we get the words *diabolical* and *devil*). But the Armenians use the word, *char*. This word is comprised of two parts. As with all Armenian words, the “չ/ch” sounds is a negative sound, almost always meaning “not”. “ար/ar” comes from the Classical Armenian word առնել/arnel which means “to make, do, create”. This is where we get the words արարիչ/ararich, արարած/araradz, and even Արարսւն/Ararat (the Mt. Olympus of the Armenians where all the gods lived). Չար/char, thus means “that which is not created”. God did not create the devil or evil in this world – we did, and we continue to do it through disobedience to His will.

We then can look at different passages in the Bible with new meaning, especially Psalm 23: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil”. In reality we are praying, “I shall not fear that which you did not create and which I have given power and whose power I can take away”.

So as we conclude the *Lord’s Prayer* with this final request, let us remember the entire prayer, because we ask that our heavenly Father’s will be done so that His kingdom may become a reality on earth just as it is a reality in heaven. And as we pray for our daily wants and needs, let us forgive, so we can ask for forgiveness. And if there be any difficulty in our lives, let us not fail or feel hopeless in them, but grow stronger and firmer in our faith becoming more reliant on God, always remembering that Christ has freed us from sin, death and Satan, but we must strive not to give the Evil one the power it craves to control us. For truly the kingdom, power and glory belongs only to the Holy Trinity. Amen.