

Eleventh Sunday of the Holy Cross – Sin and Temptation

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX
November 20, 2016
Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1-13*

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

Sin is a constant reality in the life of a Christian and will be part of this world until Christ's Second Coming. Yet, sin is understood differently in different languages and cultures. Greeks use the word, ἁμαρτία (hamartia), which means "missing the mark/target". Armenians use the word, մեղք (meghk), which is related to the Latin word, malus, which means "bad". But for Christians, sin is defined as anything that leads us away from God and disrupts our relationship with God. Sin is anything that prevents us from following His Word or will.

This happens when we come too close to sin and are tempted to go against what we are supposed to do. Sometimes we think we can withstand temptation and sin, even when it surrounds us, believing that our faith and will are strong, but this is not true. We are human beings and we are weak. This is why Jesus teaches us to conclude the Lord's Prayer with, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

This past week we had an unwanted visitor at our church. Tuesday, when I arrived at the church, I got out of my car and immediately smelt something strange. As I approached the church, the odor grew stronger, until I opened the doors of the narthex and it hit me: skunk. A skunk crawled under the church and sprayed, so now the narthex, offices and even bathrooms smell like skunk.

I turned on the air and lit some incense, and eventually the smell disappeared, so I continued to work in my office. When I arrived home, my wife, Hasmik, noticed an awful smell coming from me and it was then that we realized that the skunk smell was on my clothing as well. I showered and changed, but just being around the smell was enough for it to stay on me. This is what sin is like: being around it is temptation and even if we don't want to do the sin, it has a way of becoming part of you without your knowledge.

For the past week I have tried almost everything to get rid of the smell from the narthex, offices and bathrooms. A parishioner brought an oxidizer to break up the particles in the air, another offered to buy skunk spray from the store, I have opened the doors and kept the air

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conditioner on all week. However throughout all of this, a miracle has taken place and lesson has been learned.

The skunk enter under the narthex, offices and bathrooms because it is hollow with pier and beams, yet the church is also hollow and the skunk's smell did not come anywhere in the church. This teaches us that the prayer is the greatest tool to keep sin and temptation out of our lives. When we pray, our relationship with God is strengthened and healthy. Sin cannot enter or disrupt us. The greatest prayer we have is the very prayer that the Lord taught us, which we hear in today's Gospel reading.

So when we pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", we are asking Christ to give us the ability to smell and recognize sin when it is near. And when we realize that sin is nearby, let us not approach it, investigating what it is, but flee from it in prayer, humility and repentance.

Amen.