

**Addresses
for
Morning and Evening Prayer**

**according to the
1943 Lectionary
of the
USA 1928 Book of Common Prayer**

**Intended for use
by Layreaders
in the absence of a priest**

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Lent 3

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Deut 6:1-9, 20-25

*Here beginneth the sixth chapter
of the Book of Deuteronomy*

1 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it:

2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

8 And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

9 And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

20 And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?

21 Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand:

22 And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes:

23 And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers.

24 And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

25 And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: 1 Cor 3

*Here beginneth the third chapter of
the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.*

1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The truth of Christ is witnessed
by His own resurrection,
but also by the new life in Him
of those who admit their sins,
beg for forgiveness,
and come to the Cross in hope and in trust.
May that be our own experience this Lent,
and may it show in our lives,
not just in our words,
to lighten the way
for those whose hearts God is softening.

Let us pray.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

On his release he did set about to do God's will,
 but reluctantly, grumbling all the way,
 Jonah knew the will of God.
 At long last he was following it.
 He bore God's message to the people of Nineveh
 that, because of their sins,
 they would be destroyed.
 Like many religious people,
 like some of us, perhaps,
 or, in some ways, like all of us,
 he was happiest when he could find
 someone to condemn for something.
 How often we define ourselves
 by what we are not!
 We know right and wrong
 (or at least we think we do),
 though we tend to concentrate
 on the parts that condemn someone else,
 and make us look better than they.
 Don't we often gloat, ever so righteously,
 when the sins of that other church
 seem to be catching up with them?
 Jonah knew God's judgment -- on others --
 but his words had an unexpected result.
 The people of Nineveh realized their sinfulness,
 and came to know the mercy of God.
 They repented. They changed.
 They were forgiven.
 And Jonah grumbled.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation
 gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;
 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for
 the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed
 by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of
 what sort it is.
 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built
 thereupon, he shall receive a reward.
 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer
 loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.
 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and
 that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall
 God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which
 temple ye are.
 18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among
 you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become
 a fool, that he may be wise.
 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness
 with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in
 their own craftiness.
 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of
 the wise, that they are vain.
 21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all
 things are your's;
 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the
 world, or life, or death, or things present, or things
 to come; all are your's;
 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

*"Shema Yishra-el,
Hear, O Israel:
The LORD our God is one LORD."*

These are the words said lovingly
by an observant Jew
in every important moment of life,
in every prayer prayed,
and (if it may be so) at the hour of death.
These words are written on bits of parchment,
worn in little boxes on the hand and the forehead,
and nailed to the doorposts of their homes.

This is the God who revealed Himself to them,
claimed them for His own,
who led them out of slavery,
and led them through their whole history.
This is the God who revealed Himself to us,
who, in His infinite love sent His Son
for our redemption,
who delivered us from slavery to sin,
who will lead us through this life,
and into eternity.
This is the God of whom we are commanded:

*"Thou shalt love the LORD thy God
with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy might,"*

words we hear in every Prayer Book Eucharist.
We hear them, we repeat them,
but we so seldom actually obey them.

No, there would be no such powerful sign,
no such compelling proof,
as to bind the will of the unbeliever,
but instead
such signs as witness to His insistent call,
that whisper His unceasing invitation,
and thus there would be
"... the sign of Jonas the prophet."

And what is this mysterious sign?
Well, first of all it is found in the most striking part
of his story.

Jonas (or Jonah) is well known as the prophet
who spent three days in the belly of the whale
(actually, Scripture says "a great fish")
and, by the power of God was saved from that fate,
and was seen and heard alive..

So it was that Jesus was in His tomb three days
and rose up from the dead,
appearing many times to His disciples.

"Surely here is proof!" we might say.
To those who wished to believe, it certainly was,
But it was to them that He appeared.
He confirmed their faith.
He didn't show Himself in the public square,
for it is faith that He desires.

That is the central thought here,
but perhaps there is more.
Perhaps Lent may move us to look another direction.
Jonah was reluctant to do
what he knew God wanted.
He was actually fleeing from God
when the fish took him.

Homily

They were looking for signs and wonders.
 What did that mean to them,
 and how does it relate to us?
 Sure, there were people looking for miracles,
 for showy and surprising events,
 for their own sake,
 for the excitement of it.
 There still are.
 People like to be entertained,
 and they like their God to entertain them.
 But is there perhaps a deeper thought here?
 Some of those people were educated people,
 thoughtful people, inquiring people,
 They knew the Scriptures,
 they knew the promise of the Messiah,
 they even wanted it all to be true,
 but they demanded proof.
 People still demand proof.
 But God is God.
 He is who He is.
 He does not have to prove Himself to us,
 and proof, indeed, as Our Lord said,
 is not coming.
"This is an evil generation:" He said, *"they seek a sign;
 and there shall no sign be given it, ..."*
 no flashy miracles
 (though He did quietly work miracles when love
 demanded),
 no spectacular signs in the sky
 (though a few had seen the star at His birth).

There are so many things that get our attention,
 that distract us from the things of God,
 that steal our love from Him,
 capture our hearts and souls,
 and direct our energies to serve something else.

That is known as sin.

The words of Our God are to be heard,
 to be lived and to be taught,
 not only on Sundays and other religious occasions,
 not only in the church,
 but in our daily lives, every day,
 when we walk by the way,
 and when we lie down,
 and when we rise up.,
 in everything we do.

This is not a message for Lent alone,
 but Lent is a time for taking inventory,
 to see how our love for God
 is being expressed -- or denied --

by the way that we live.

St. Paul carries this thought just a bit further,
 in a way particularly appropriate to us Anglicans.
 We like to pride ourselves on being
 a bit more educated than others,
 a bit more dignified.
 As Catholic Christians we hold to
 a deeper understanding of certain mysteries.
 In many respects all of this is true.
 We are Anglicans because we believe that to be so.

However,
we need to hear St. Paul's biting words,
and, each of us, to take them personally.

*I, brethren, could not speak unto you
as unto spiritual,
but as unto carnal,
even as unto babes in Christ.*

What is he saying to us?
Is he telling us, perhaps,
that all our 'extra knowledge'
all our theological and liturgical sophistication,
is not what it takes to make us good Christians?
He tells the Corinthians, and perhaps us,
that they are not ready for the deeper stuff.
Why? Because, where it really matters,
they just didn't get it,
and perhaps we don't either..

That church was badly divided.
There was constant bickering over who was right.
Everyone seemed to be more concerned
to have someone to oppose,
than to commit their lives to the Lord.
Have you noticed how much easier it is
to identify an enemy
than to face the enemy within ourselves?
We are so good at finding others to reject
that we forget to look inside.
We are, as Jesus said, so busy criticizing
the specks in another's eye,
that we don't notice the log in our own.

Second Lesson: Luke 11:29-36

*Here beginneth the twenty-ninth verse of the eleventh
chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.*

29 And when the people were gathered thick together,
he began to say, This is an evil generation: they
seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but
the sign of Jonas the prophet.

30 For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so
shall also the Son of man be to this generation.

31 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment
with the men of this generation, and condemn
them: for she came from the utmost parts of the
earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold,
a greater than Solomon is here.

32 The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the
judgment with this generation, and shall condemn
it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and,
behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

33 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth
it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a
candlestick, that they which come in may see the
light.

34 The light of the body is the eye: therefore when
thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of
light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is
full of darkness.

35 Take heed therefore that the light which is in
thee be not darkness.

36 If thy whole body therefore be full of light,
having no part dark, the whole shall be full of
light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth
give thee light.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Prov 4:7-18

*Here beginneth the seventh verse
of the fourth chapter of the Book of Proverbs.*

7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.

10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many.

11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.

12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

13 Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.

14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.

15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

16 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.

17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence.

18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

*"the wisdom of this world," continues the Apostle,
"is foolishness with God.*

For it is written,

He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

And again,

*The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise,
that they are vain.*

Therefore let no man glory in men."

It's not who I am,

what I do,

how much I know,

that matters,

but that I am a sinner and I need help,

just as much as the one I'm squabbling with

*"Thou shalt love the LORD thy God
with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy might,"*

When we get that right,

then we know how to use the riches we have been
given,

and to share them.

Let us pray.

Let our eyes be upon thee, O Lord.

Let our hearts overflow with thy love.

Let our lives show thy presence.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Zech 1:1-6, 12-17

Here beginneth the Book of the Prophet Zechariah.

1 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,

2 The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers.

3 Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.

4 Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.

5 Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?

6 But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned and said, Like as the LORD of hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
 in the darkness of this world thou didst come
 to thy blessed mother's womb, to visit us;
 in the night of thy betrayal
 thou didst wash thy disciples' feet,
 and didst give thyself to scorning and reproof;
 and upon the Cross thou didst die for our sins.
 Unworthy we pray thee, hear our prayer,
 lighten our darkness, show us our sins,
 and forgive us the evils we have done,
 and lead us, by the power of thy Holy Spirit
 ever nearer the fullness of thine everlasting image,
 thou that livest and reignest with the Father
 and the same Spirit, one God to ages everlasting.
 Amen.

Is there any one of us free of these things?
 Any of us, if we are honest, have to admit
 that we have sinned in many of those ways,
 that many of those attitudes are within us,
 and that we will sin again, and he says,
 "shall not inherit."

"Woe is me! Who shall deliver me?"
 says St. Paul in another place,
 and we, if we know the truth about ourselves,
 might well echo him.

But that's why Jesus died.
 That's why he stands insistently
 at the doors of our hearts,
 knocking, knocking, knocking,
 calling, calling, calling,
 that's why He leads us
 through the waters of Baptism,
 that's why He feeds us with spiritual food.

If we call upon Him, pleading for forgiveness,
 He forgives.
 More than that,
 He pours His own Holy Spirit upon us.
 He begins a change within us,
 and the fruit of the Spirit grows until it blooms.

*And "... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
 longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
 Meekness, temperance:
 against such there is no law.
 And they that are Christ's
 have crucified the flesh
 with the affections and lusts.*

13 And the LORD answered the angel that talked
 with me with good words and comfortable words.

14 So the angel that communed with me said unto
 me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of
 hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with
 a great jealousy.

15 And I am very sore displeased with the heathen
 that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased,
 and they helped forward the affliction.

16 Therefore thus saith the LORD; I am returned
 to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built
 in it, saith the LORD of hosts, and a line shall be
 stretched forth upon Jerusalem.

17 Cry yet, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts;
 My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread
 abroad; and the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and
 shall yet choose Jerusalem.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Mark 8:27-9:1

Here beginneth the twenty-seventh verse of the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

27 And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?

28 And they answered, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.

29 And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

30 And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.

31 And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

33 But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

34 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

"But," you may say,
"That's the Old Testament.
Isn't that all just legalism?"

Well, hear the words of St. Paul the Apostle, the words he wrote to the Galatians, the words we read a few moments ago:

*"Walk in the spirit," he says,
"and you won't be ruled by the flesh,"*
and he goes on,
*"...IF ye be led of the Spirit,
ye are not under the law."*

That sounds almost like saying that sin is so easily forgiven that it hardly counts, doesn't it?

A lot of Christians take it that way, but listen on. St. Paul is not done. He follows this immediately by a horrendous list. (some of the words in the King James are a little obscure, but the translation in the Revised Standard is fair and clear)

*"Now the works of the flesh are plain:
immorality, impurity, licentiousness,
idolatry, sorcery,
enmity, strife, jealousy,
anger, selfishness, dissension,
party spirit, envy,
drunkenness, carousing, and the like.
... those who do such things
shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

"Shall not inherit," what horrible words.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
 longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no
 law.
 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the
 flesh with the affections and lusts.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

Fragments of what we heard from the Prophet Amos:

*"For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel,
 Seek ye me, and ye shall live:
 Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; ...
 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live:
 and so the LORD, the God of hosts,
 shall be with you, ...
 Hate the evil, and love the good, ...
 it may be that the LORD God of hosts
 will be gracious ..."*

On the other hand he speaks of God's judgment
 on those who "seek Bethel"
 (the place where false gods were worshiped),
 and those who 'tread upon the poor."

This stark contrast is a constant theme
 of the Old Testament Prophets.
 It is important to renounce evil.
 It is important to seek God and His ways --
 not only important, but vital.
 Life depends upon it.
 Judgment hangs in the balance.

36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain
 the whole world, and lose his own soul?
 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his
 soul?
 38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me
 and of my words in this adulterous and sinful gen-
 eration; of him also shall the Son of man be
 ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Fa-
 ther with the holy angels.

9:1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you,
 That there be some of them that stand here, which
 shall not taste of death, till they have seen the
 kingdom of God come with power.

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily

Psalm 107, various verses:

*"Such as sit in darkness,
and in the shadow of death ...
because they rebelled against the words of the Lord,
and lightly regarded the counsel
of the Most Highest ...
So ... they cried unto the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress. ...
O that men would therefore praise the Lord
for his goodness;
and declare the wonders that he doeth ...
Foolish men are plagued for their offense ...
they cried unto the Lord ...
he delivered ..."*

One of the most prominent themes
of the Old Testament Scriptures
is the cycle repeated several times in this Psalm.
It appears in several other Psalms,
is the central theme of the Book of Judges,
and shows up in the words of the Prophets,
over and over again,
in passages like our First Lesson.

God's people find themselves in serious trouble.
When they hit bottom, that's when they remember
God.

They cry out in pain.

God hears them and the pain is relieved.

Comfortable, they forget God,
and by their own foolishness fall again into trouble,
and, when they hit bottom ... (you get the idea.)

13 Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that
time; for it is an evil time.

14 Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and
so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you,
as ye have spoken.

15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish
judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD
God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of
Joseph.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Gal 5:16-24

*Here beginneth the sixteenth verse of the fifth
chapter of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians.*

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall
not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the
Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the
one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things
that ye would.

18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under
the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest,
which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness,
lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emula-
tions, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,
and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I
have also told you in time past, that they which do
such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Amos 5:4-15

*Here beginneth the fourth verse
of the fifth chapter of the Prophet Amos.*

4 For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel,
Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

5 But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and
pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go
into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought.

6 Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break
out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it,
and there be none to quench it in Bethel.

7 Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave
off righteousness in the earth,

8 Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
and turneth the shadow of death into the morning,
and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth
for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out
upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name:

9 That strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong,
so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.

10 They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and
they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.

11 Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon
the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat:
ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall
not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vine-
yards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.

12 For I know your manifold transgressions and
your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a
bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from
their right.

That's the way the history of Israel went.
That's the way the history of the Church has gone.
And that's the life-story
of each and every Christian.

The Hebrew nation knew the truth.
The Holy Church of God knows the truth.
You and I know the truth.

But sometimes,
well, sometimes it's like St. Peter's story.
He knew.

He had just made the most astounding statement
anyone in the history of the world had ever made,
"You are the Christ, the Messiah,
the Son of the Living God!"

We hear in another of the Gospels
that Jesus told him,
"You didn't hear this from men,
but from God Himself."

On the strength of this wonderful confession,
he was made leader of the Apostles,
and given powerful promises;
and immediately

he let his own idea of what would be good
blind him

to the Lord's talk of death and resurrection.

And then, as his Lord and Master was on trial,
he denied him.

He hit bottom, cried out in despair, and was heard.

On the day of Pentecost

he once again leads the infant church,

and in Antioch waffles again,

and seems to forget that the Gentiles too can be
full brothers,

and is strongly corrected by St. Paul.

He cries out to the Lord, and lives and dies
once again the leader of God's people,
giving his life in the boldness of martyrdom.

The Prophet Zechariah saw this happening,
he spoke the words of the Lord with fervor,
seeking to stop the downslide,
to interrupt the cycle,
to call the people back to righteousness,
as he spoke, he quoted the Lord as saying this:
*"my words and my statutes,
which I commanded my servants the prophets,
did they not take hold of your fathers?
and they returned ..."*

and, though they fell, they returned,
and returned again, and again,
and so do we.

That's what Lent is for,
to remind us of the Word of the Lord,
both of His displeasure at our sins,
and of His passionate call to return.
Every year it calls us to interrupt the cycle,
to stop our mad and headlong flight from God,
and to return to His mercy,
and His righteousness.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
in the darkness of this world thou didst come
to thy blessed mother's womb, to visit us;
in the night of thy betrayal
thou didst wash thy disciples' feet,
and didst give thyself to scorning and reproof;
and upon the Cross thou didst die for our sins.
Unworthy we pray thee, hear our prayer,
lighten our darkness, show us our sins,
and forgive us the evils we have done,
and lead us, by the power of thy Holy Spirit
ever nearer the fullness of thine everlasting image,
thou that livest and reignest with the Father
and the same Spirit, one God to ages everlasting.
Amen.
