

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name

Many of you who spend time here in the mornings

know that I am an avid coffee drinker.

I have a half-a-pot a day habit

that I have been nurturing for a number of years.

I tried to give it up once.

I will never forget that day

– it was my first day teaching graduate level biblical Greek.

I don't know what I was thinking.

It was not the day to give up caffeine.

So the second day I taught Greek,

I rationalized with myself.

I eat well and exercise regularly.

I don't smoke and I don't drink to excess.

So if I consume a little caffeine to get my day started,

I'm still ahead of the game, right?

Good logic, I thought.

Well, it's been a few years now since that fateful event

and not much has changed with my habit,

which made this past Tuesday a bit of a crisis for me.

If you remember earlier this week,

it snowed all day Monday,

all night Monday

and most of the morning on Tuesday.

I got up went downstairs to make coffee

and discovered we were out of coffee filters.

That's okay – I have a back up French press

for just such an occasion...that I couldn't find anywhere.

It was a travesty.

The snow was so bad and where I live in Butler County,

we were still being told to stay off the roads –

I couldn't justify getting in the car for coffee.

I wanted coffee, now, and I didn't want to have to wait to get it.

On the other side of Tuesday,

I have to think back and wonder

if that need to have a desire filled instantly

haunts many of us at times.

Maybe it isn't morning coffee,

but we desire to have many things

and sometimes will go to unhealthy means to get whatever we want.

This could be a whole host of desires.

Things that seem to tempt us into thinking our lives will stop

if we don't have them.

Perhaps it's the latest piece of technology,

a new car that's a little out of our price range

or a handbag or piece of clothing that we just can't wait to go on sale.

Sure, one at a time may not be too big of a deal,

but these temptations can add up

and eat away at time and resources

that may better be used in other ways.

These temptations are a part of our lives

and often come in packages that seem to be the least threatening.

They may even be disguised as things we need to survive.
Temptation isn't always neatly packaged with a red warning label that says,
"Hey, look out; I'm here to tempt you!"
More often than not,
it's sneaky, underhanded and cleverly disguised.
This idea of temptation is a notion that our Gospel text takes seriously today.
In Luke's version of Jesus' temptation,
we get a glimpse into the Son of God himself being tempted.

In this passage from Luke's gospel,
Jesus is returning from the Jordan River.
He was just baptized and is led by the Holy Spirit in the wilderness.
There he is without food for forty days and tempted by the devil.
While Jesus is famished,
the devil tempts him with three things
all of us would probably like to have:
food, real estate and power over death.

What becomes evident in this passage is that the devil is a clever guy.
The first thing he says according is "If you are the Son of God."
Really, a better translation of that would be,
"Since you are..."
or "Because you are the Son of God."

The first thing out of the devil's mouth is an acknowledgement of who Jesus is.
At Jesus baptism the voice of God cried out, "You are my Son!"
Well, the devil picked up on that one pretty quickly, didn't he?
The devil knows exactly who he's dealing with.

So, the devil tells Jesus that because he is the Son of God and he's hungry,
he should turn a stone into bread.

Jesus simply responds, "One does not live by bread alone."

Isn't that interesting?

We could say that Jesus doesn't fall into the temptation
of arguing with the devil, too.

He just quotes Scripture.

Jesus doesn't bicker or argue –

he throws scripture in the devil's face

as a reminder that

through God we have power over physical desires.

Undeterred, the devil tried again.

This time He whisks Jesus up to show him all the kingdoms in the world.

He then told Jesus that he would give him all the authority over them,
if only Jesus would worship him.

Well, last I checked,

the devil doesn't have authority over the kingdoms of the world.

I'm pretty sure God was in charge then just as he is now.

First, the devil lies to Jesus,

and then tells Jesus to worship him.

Again, Jesus doesn't argue or point out that he's lying.

He simply quotes scripture again saying,

"Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

Worshipping anyone other than God is outside the realm of who Jesus is.

He is God's Son.

He doesn't worship any one so that he can have power or authority.
He stands firm and is faithful to God even when he is famished.

Besides, Jesus' authority comes from God and God alone.

Finally, the devil tells Jesus to cast himself from a great height
because God will not let him be harmed.

Test God, the devil says,

see if he will let you die by jumping off the temple.

See if you will get power over death.

This is the worst temptation in this well crafted argument.

Here, the devil uses Scripture falsely.

Interesting, isn't it?

The devil quotes Psalm 91,

- part of the passage we used for our opening dialog -
he knows Scripture.

Huh, tricky little devil.

But Jesus knows better,

he can see the poor use of Scripture
and knows that God is not to be tested.

In fact in all three of stages of this argument,

Jesus uses Scriptures that point to who God is.

God is gracious and merciful.

God meets our needs.

God is holy and completely other than we are.

God is to be worshipped.

God can be trusted, so much so that we don't need to test him.

It makes me wonder, was this whole battle with the devil

trying to get Jesus into an identity crisis
over who he was as the Son of God?

Seems that way to me.

It also seems to me that if Jesus was tempted and tested,
we will be, too.

Perhaps it's not so much a matter of if we will be tested,
but when we will be tested.

I think for us, like for Jesus,
we are at our worst when we are hungry and tired,
or maybe if you're like me, lacking coffee.

When our physical needs aren't being met
it is easier to slide into bad habits or unhealthy behaviors.

When it feels like things aren't going our way,
it's easier to make poor choices
or trust a voice that may be misleading us.

In this passage, we have a lesson.

We have an example from Christ
about who he is and who we are called to be.

Remember that last scene with the devil in Jerusalem?

The devil tempted Jesus to throw himself down
to see if God would save him from dying.

But that's not who Jesus is.

Instead, Jesus will later go to Jerusalem of his own free will.
He will be put on trial, crucified and be killed.

He was not saved from death.

Jesus obediently went to his death
so that through his death and resurrection
he could defeat the power of death.

An event that we are all a part of by being God's children.

A good thing to remember when we are in the grip of temptation.

I often think that when times are tough,
when we are tempted,
we suffer from what I like to call baptismal amnesia.
We forget that we are a part of God's family.
That we have been made God's children.

This week begins our look at the Lord's Prayer
using the Lenten devotional guide
and our focus is, "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name."

I think these two phrases that begin this prayer
teach us one great way to respond in the midst of temptation.

First, let's keep in mind that Jesus commands us to pray this prayer (21)¹.

Sure, it makes a nice model and example,
but according to Jesus,
we are called to pray this particular prayer.
He gives marching orders, so to speak.

And through teaching this prayer,
Jesus instills in us bold confidence to pray as he did.

¹ All page numbers in parentheses refer to *Book of Faith Lenten Journey 40 Days with the Lord's Prayer*, by Henry French, Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, MN (2009).

First, we are invited to address God as Our Father.

With these two words we are reminded that
we are in community with one another.

We don't begin with, "my" Father, but our Father.

Even if we offer this prayer by ourselves,
we never pray it alone (23).

This is the community's prayer
that reminds us that together we are God's children.

And at the same time, we address God as Father.

A word that describes an intimate, close relationship (24).

One that we have access to only through Jesus, God's Son.

But what makes this fatherly relationship different is that this Father,
unlike our earthly parents, is in heaven.

This is a reminder that our relationships here
with their brokenness and imperfections
are merely reflections
of the relationship that God has with us.

God is like a parent to us – but so much more!

God is like the perfect father –
yet so much beyond what any earthly father could strive to be.

God is in heaven and yet available to us.

God is not our reflection, but we are his reflection.

And because God is beyond us,

we are also called to pray hallowed be your name.

When we pray this together, we are being bold

to ask God to be who he says he will be.

We are telling God to make his name holy!

Another way to see this might be,

let your name be holy

and let it be holy among us now(30).

In a sense, with these words,

we are confidently and boldly telling God to be himself,

that is our Father and to continue to be divine and holy.

All that God is and does cannot be captured in words,

but only magnified with his own glory.

And as his children we are invited to be a part of it.

And also as his children we are all created with a need

to be in a relationship with God.

Part of any relationship is communication,

and we communicate with God through prayer.

Sometimes the hard part, especially when times are tough

is remembering that relationship we have with God.

Perhaps this series looking at the Lord's Prayer in depth

will help us recall that this prayer isn't a last resort,

but an important first step in communicating with God.

That may make more sense when things are going our way,

but a challenge when we are tempted.

The trick is being ready.

Knowing that when temptation comes – not if, but when –

we can pray even just the first two phrases of this prayer

and be praying that God join us to one another

as brothers and sisters.

Because it's harder to stumble when we have help.

And that through God making himself holy,

we are reminded that we are not God.

We do not have all the answers,

but belong to the one who does.

The one who gave himself for our sake.

Who showed us how to behave in the midst of the devil.

Who refused to let anything deter him from the path laid out to save us.

And that we, too, like Jesus are called to go to God for strength.

To pray to him as our Father

And to trust him with our lives

because he alone is holy and worthy to be praised.