

“Guide Us through the Wilderness”

Our prayer in the Collect of the Day is that the Lord would guide us through the wilderness of this world to our life with Him in the glory of heaven. This is the prayer of the Church – from Adam and Eve, down through the ages, to you today.

“In the beginning” Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden of Eden – but then they walked away from Him and His Word. Their sin separated them from God and cast them out into the wilderness.

Ever since, all of Adam’s descendants have followed in his footsteps – walking their own way. And yet, the Lord doesn’t abandon them – He continues to come to them, because of His desire that we should live with Him – not just in this life, but for eternity.

The Old Testament often speaks of the “two ways” – the way of life, and the way of death. God leads His people on the path of life, warning them not to turn from it to the right or to the left. But like wandering sheep, they go astray, they go their own way – and put themselves in danger.

The Lord leads Abraham to the Promised Land – but his descendants end up in Egypt, the land of slavery. That’s not where they are supposed to be – but that is where their sin has brought them.

So, the Lord comes to them and leads them out of slavery. He leads them to the brink of the Promised Land – but they will not enter, because of their unbelief. So, it is back out into the desolate and lifeless wilderness, to wander for forty years.

Now, in the New Testament, Jesus (God’s own Son), appears on the scene – and He is led by the Holy Spirit “in the wilderness” for forty days – being tempted by the devil. It’s as if all mankind is reduced to One person – to Jesus who takes our place – and who walks the path laid out for Him by the Father – and all of this is “for you.”

He willingly goes into the wilderness in order to lead you back to God. God’s own Son takes on human flesh to walk in your shoes – to take the place of all who wander through the wilderness of his fallen world.

And there, He is tempted – because YOU are tempted. He is tempted in every way as you are – and yet, He is without sin. He does not turn aside from the path that the Father has laid out for Him. Throughout His forty days, Jesus lives by faith – not in Himself and His own abilities – but in His Father’s love and protection.

These temptations that Jesus faces are REAL. Remember, He is not only true God, but He is also true MAN. Having fasted for forty days, He’s hungry!

You know all too well how REAL the temptations are that you face in life – and how quickly you give in, and turn aside. How easy it is to be led astray by the three great enemies (the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh).

How easy it is to throw something in your neighbor’s face – that embarrassing secret, that past sin, their failures and weaknesses. And why? To get revenge – to distract from your shortcomings – to put them in their place. You act like your own god by lowering and humiliating them and exalting yourself above them.

Our flesh is weak. We try to abstain from gluttony, drunkenness, pornography, or gossiping – but the flesh is easily enticed. We get off track and the devil works hard to keep us there. He tempts us to believe that our sin is not harmful – coaxing us to continue down the path he has laid out for us.

Jesus has come to take your place. He is vulnerable, and the devil attacks Him with his IF-THEN temptations. He’s very deceptive in his attempts to lead astray – acting as if he is the one who calls the shots – not God. He tries to distract Jesus from the Father – tempting Him to trust in Himself – to provide for Himself.

With one temptation after another, the devil tries to get Jesus to follow him and his words – as if he is God – but Jesus doesn’t take the bait. He trusts the Word of His Father. He knows “one little word can” fell the devil.

And so it is for YOU. God’s Word is your weapon against the old evil foe. The words and promises of God guide and lead you – providing for you – protecting and delivering you.

Your experience in life teaches you that you don't get very far before you are once again off-track. Rather than living by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – you live by your own word – or by the tempting lies the devil scatters before you. And having succumbed to the temptations – guilt and shame, and a sense of hopelessness overwhelms you.

Dearly beloved, you do not walk alone – for Christ has walked this road for you. He has been faithful where you have failed. Rather than living in guilt and despair and the fear of death – Jesus returns you to His path of life by forgiving your sin.

Jesus is in the wilderness because of you, and “for you.” He overcomes all your temptations and covers all your sin with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. He has come from heaven to earth – to walk in your shoes, to live your life – to restore you to the right path, reconciling you to the Father, and leading you in the way of life.

Throughout this wilderness wandering that is your life – the Holy Spirit leads you in faith – trusting not in your obedience, but in Christ, who delivers you and restores you. That is why you pray that the Lord would guide you through this life to your heavenly home – because it is impossible for you to walk it alone.

Through faith in Jesus, the Lord leads you to the Promised Land of heaven. He sets before you His very own Body and Blood – the Bread of Life – to set you free from the slavery of your sin, to defeat your enemies, and to strengthen you in the temptations you endure.

Stay with us Lord, through temptations hour, to fight our ancient foe. Lord, stay with us throughout our life – and bring us to our heavenly home. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.