

(From *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, translated by Dominican Fathers John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan, 1923)

The Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And lead us not into temptation."

Importance of instruction on this Petition

When the children of God, having obtained the pardon of their sins, are inflamed with the desire of giving to God worship and veneration; when they long for the kingdom of Heaven; when they engage in the performance of all the duties of piety towards the Deity, relying entirely on His paternal will and providence, – then it is that the enemy of mankind employs the more actively all his artifices, and prepares all his resources to attack them so violently as to justify the fear that, wavering and altered in their sentiments, they may relapse into sin, and thus become far worse than they had been before. To such as these may justly be applied the saying of the Prince of the Apostles: It had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than, after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them. [2 Peter 2:21]

Hence Christ the Lord has commanded us to offer this Petition so that we may commend ourselves daily to God, and implore His paternal care and assistance, being assured that, if we be deserted by the Divine protection, we shall soon fall into the snares of our most crafty enemy. Nor is it in the Lord's Prayer alone that He has commanded us to beg of God not to suffer us to be led into temptation. In His address to the holy Apostles also, on the very eve of His Death, after He had declared them clean, [John 13:10] He admonished them of this duty in these words: Pray that ye enter not into temptation. [Matthew 26:41]

This admonition, reiterated by Christ the Lord, imposes on the pastor the weighty obligation of exciting the faithful to a frequent use of this prayer, so that, beset as men constantly are by the great dangers which the devil prepares, they may ever address to God, Who alone can repel those dangers, the prayer, Lead us not into temptation.'

Necessity of the Sixth Petition

Human frailty

The faithful will understand how very much they stand in need of this Divine assistance, if

they remember their own weakness and ignorance, if they recollect this saying of Christ the Lord: The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak; [Matthew 26:41] if they call to mind how grievous and destructive are the misfortunes of men brought on through the instigation of the devil, unless they be upheld and assisted by the right hand of the Most High.

What more striking example can there be of human infirmity, than the holy band of the Apostles, who, though they had just before felt very courageous, at the first sight of danger, abandoned the Saviour and fled. A still more conspicuous example is the conduct of the Prince of the Apostles. He who a short time before loudly protested his courage and special loyalty to Christ the Lord, he who had been so confident in himself as to say, Though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee [Matthew 26:35] became so affrighted at the voice of a poor maid-servant that he declared at once with an oath that he knew not the Lord. Doubtless his courage was not equal to his good-will. But if, by the frailty of human nature in which they confided, even the Saints have sinned grievously, what have not others to fear, who are so far below them in holiness?

The assaults of the flesh

Wherefore, let the pastor remind the faithful of the conflicts and dangers in which we are continually engaged, as long as the soul is in this mortal body, assailed as we are on all sides by the world, the flesh and the devil.

How few are there who are not compelled to experience at their great cost what anger, what concupiscence can do in us? Who is not annoyed by these stings? Who does not feel these goads? Who does not burn with these smoldering fires? And, indeed, so various are these assaults, so diversified these attacks, that it is extremely difficult not to receive some grievous wound.

The temptations of the devil

And besides these enemies that dwell and live with us, there are, moreover, those most bitter foes, of whom it is written: Our wrestling is not against, flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world' of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. [Ephesians 6:12] For to our inward conflicts are added the external assaults and attacks of the demons, who both assail us openly, and also insinuate themselves by stratagem into our souls, so much so that it is only with great difficulty that we can escape them.

The Apostle entitles the demons princes, on account of the excellence of their nature, since by nature they are superior to man, and to all other visible creatures. He also calls them powers, because they excel not only by their nature, but also by their power. He designates them rulers of the world of darkness, because they rule not the world of light and glory, that is to say, the good and the pious, but the world of gloom and darkness, namely, those who, blinded by the defilement and darkness of a wicked life, are satisfied to have for their leader the devil, the prince of darkness. He also terms the demons the spirits of wickedness, because there is a wickedness of the spirit, as well as of the flesh. What is called the wickedness of the flesh inflames the appetite to lusts and pleasures, which are perceived by the senses; while the wickedness of the spirit are evil purposes and depraved desires, which belong to the superior part of the soul, and which are so much worse than the wickedness of the flesh as mind itself and reason are higher and more excellent (than the senses). The wickedness of satan, the Apostle spoke of as in the high places, because the chief aim of the evil one is to deprive us of our heavenly inheritance.

Audacity of the demons

From all this we may understand that the power of these enemies is great, their courage undaunted, their hatred of us enormous and unmeasured; that they also wage against us a perpetual war, so that with them there can be no peace, no truce.

How great is their audacity is evidenced by the words of satan, recorded by the Prophet: I will ascend into heaven. [Isaias 14:13] He attacked our first parents in Paradise; he assailed the Prophets; he beset the Apostles in order, as the Lord says in the Gospel, that he might sift them as wheat. [Luke 22:31] Nor was he abashed even by the presence of Christ the Lord Himself. His insatiable desire and unwearied diligence St. Peter therefore expressed when he said: Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion goeth about, seeking whom he may devour. [1 Peter 5:8]

Number of the demons

But it is not satan alone that tempts men, for sometimes a host of demons combine to attack an individual. This that evil spirit confessed, who, having been asked his name by Christ the Lord, replied, My name is legion; [Mark 5:9] that is to say, a multitude of demons, tormented their unhappy victim. And of another demon it is written: He taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. [Matthew 12:45]

Malignity and power of the demons

There are many who, because they do not feel the assaults of demons against them, imagine that the whole matter is fictitious; nor is it surprising that such persons are not attacked by demons, to whom they have voluntarily surrendered themselves. They possess neither piety nor charity, nor any virtue worthy of a Christian; hence they are entirely in the power of the devil, and there is no need of any temptation to overcome them, since their souls have already become his willing abode.

But those who have dedicated themselves to God, leading a heavenly life upon earth, are the chief objects of the assaults of satan. Against them he harbours bitterest hatred, laying snares for them each moment. Sacred Scripture is full of examples of holy men who, in spite of their firmness and resolution, were perverted by his violence or fraud. Adam, David, Solomon and others, whom it would be tedious to enumerate, experienced the violent and crafty cunning of demons, which neither human prudence nor human strength can overcome.

Prayer protects man's weakness against the enemies of his soul

Who, then, can deem himself sufficiently secure in his own resources? Hence the necessity of offering to God pure and pious prayer, that He suffer us not to be tempted above our strength, but make issue with temptation, that we may be able to bear it. [1 Corinthians 10:13]

But should any of the faithful, through weakness or ignorance, feel terrified at the power of the demons, they are to be encouraged, when tossed by the waves of temptation, to take refuge in this harbour of prayer. For however great the power and pertinacity of satan, he cannot, in his deadly hatred of our race, tempt or torment us as much, or as long as he pleases; but all his power is governed by the control and permission of God. The example of Job is very well known. Satan could have touched nothing belonging to him, if God had not said to the devil: Behold, all that he hath is in thy hand; [Job 1:12] while on the other hand, had not the Lord added: Only put not forth thy hand upon his person, [Job 1:12] Job with his children and possessions, would have been at once destroyed by the devil. So restricted is the power of demons, that without the permission of God, they could not even enter into the swine mentioned by the Evangelists. [Matthew 8:32, Mark 5:12, Luke 8:32]

"Temptation"

To understand the meaning of this Petition, it is necessary to say what temptation signifies

here, and also what it is to be led into temptation.

To tempt is to sound a person in order that by eliciting from him what we desire, we may extract the truth. This mode of tempting does not apply to God; for what is there that God does not know? All things are naked and open to His eyes. [Hebrews 4:13]

Another kind of tempting implies more than this, inasmuch as it may have either a good or a bad purpose. Temptation has a good purpose, when someone's worth is tried, in order that when it has been tested and proved he may be rewarded and honoured, his example proposed to others for imitation, and all may be incited thereby to the praises of God. This is the only kind of tempting that can be found in God. Of it there is an example in Deuteronomy: The Lord your God tries you, that it may appear whether you love Him or not. [Deuteronomy 13:3]

In this manner God is also said to tempt His own, when He visits them with want, disease and other sorts of calamities. This He does to try their patience, and to make them an example of Christian virtue. Thus we read that Abraham was tempted to immolate his son, [Genesis 22:] by which fact he became a singular example of obedience and patience to all succeeding times. Thus also is it written of Tobias: Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. [Tobias 12:13]

Men are tempted for a bad purpose, when they are impelled to sin or destruction. To do this is the work of the devil, for he tempts men with a view to deceive and precipitate them into ruin, and he is therefore called in Scripture, the tempter. [Matthew 4:3] At one time, stimulating us from within, he employs the agency of the affections and passions of the soul. At another time, assailing us from without, he makes use of external things, as of prosperity, to puff us up with pride, or of adversity, to break our spirits. Sometimes he has for his emissaries and assistants abandoned men, particularly heretics, who, sitting in the chair of pestilence, [Psalm 1:1] scatter the deadly seeds of bad doctrines, thus unsettling and precipitating headlong those persons who draw no line of distinction between vice and virtue and are of themselves prone to evil.

“Lead us not into temptation”

We are said to be led into temptation when we yield to temptations. Now this happens in two ways. First, we are led into temptation when, yielding to suggestion, we rush into that evil to which some one tempts us. No one is thus led into temptation by God; for to no one is God the author of sin, nay, He hates all who work iniquity; [Psalm 5:5] and accordingly we also read in St. James: Let no man, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted of God; for

God is not a tempter of evils. [James 1:13]

Secondly, we are said to be led into temptation by Him Who, although He Himself does not tempt us nor cooperate in tempting us, yet is said to tempt because He does not prevent us from being tempted or from being overcome by temptations when He is able to prevent these things. In this manner God, indeed, suffers the good and the pious to be tempted, but does not leave them unsupported by His grace. Sometimes, however, we fall, being left to ourselves by the just and secret judgment of God, in punishment of our sins.

God is also said to lead us into temptation when we abuse, to our destruction, His blessings, which He has given us as a means of salvation; when, like the prodigal son, we squander our Father's substance, living riotously and yielding to our evil desires. In such a case we can say what the Apostle has said of the law: The commandment that was ordained to life, the same was found to be unto death to me. [Romans 7:10]

Of this an opportune example is Jerusalem, as we learn from Ezechiel. God had so enriched that city with every sort of embellishment, that He said of it by the mouth of the Prophet: Thou wast perfect through My beauty, which I had put upon thee. [Ezechiel 16:14] Yet Jerusalem, favoured with such an abundance of Divine gifts, was so far from showing gratitude to God, from Whom she had received and was still receiving so many favours, was so far from making use of those Heavenly gifts for the attainment of her own happiness, the end for which she had received them, that having cast away the hope and idea of deriving spiritual profit from them, she, most ungrateful to God her Father, was content to enjoy her present abundance with a luxury and riotousness which Ezechiel describes at considerable length in the same chapter. Wherefore those whom God permits to convert into instruments of vice the abundant opportunities of virtuous deeds which He has afforded them, are equally ungrateful to Him.

But we ought carefully to notice a certain usage of Sacred Scripture, which sometimes denotes the permission of God in words which, if taken literally, would imply a positive act on the part of God. Thus in Exodus we read: I will harden the heart of Pharaoh; [Exodus 7:3] and in Isaiah: Blind the heart of this people; [Isaiah 6:10] and the Apostle to the Romans writes: God delivered them up to shameful affections, and to a reprobate sense. [Romans 1:26] In these and other similar passages we are to understand, not at all any positive act on the part of God, but His permission only. [Saint Irenaeus: *Against Heretics*, Book Four, Chapter 48; Tertullian: *Against Marcion*, Book Two, Chapter 14; Saint Augustine: *On Predestination and Grace*, Chapter 1, and *On Predestination of the Saints and on the Gift of Perseverance*, Chapter 9, and *On Grace and Free Will*, Chapters 21-23; Saint Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, Part Two, First Section, Question 87, Article 2]

Objects of the Sixth Petition

What we do not pray for

These observations having been premised, it will not be difficult to understand the object for which we pray in this Petition.

We do not ask to be totally exempt from temptation, for human life is one continued temptation. This, however, is useful and advantageous to man. Temptation teaches us to know ourselves, that is, our own weakness, and to humble ourselves under the powerful hand of God; and by fighting manfully, we expect to receive a never-fading crown of glory. For he that striveth for the mastery is not crowned, except he strive lawfully. [2 Timothy 2:5] Blessed is the man, says St. James, that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him. [James 1:12] If we are sometimes hard pressed by the temptation of the enemy, it will also cheer us to reflect, that we have a High Priest to help us, Who can have compassion on our infirmities, having been tempted Himself in all things. [Hebrews 4:15]

What we pray for in this Petition

What, then, do we pray for in this Petition? We pray that the Divine assistance may not forsake us, lest having been deceived, or worsted, we should yield to temptation; and that the grace of God may be at hand to succor us when our strength fails, to refresh and invigorate us in our trials.

We should, therefore, implore the Divine assistance, in general, against all temptations, and especially when assailed by any particular temptation. This we find to have been the conduct of David, under almost every species of temptation. Against lying, he prays in these words: Take not Thou the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; [Psalm 118:43] against covetousness: Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness; [Psalm 118:36] and against the vanities of this life and the allurements of concupiscence, he prays thus: Turn away my eyes, that they may not behold vanity. [Psalm 118:37]

We pray, therefore, that we yield not to evil desires, and be not wearied in enduring temptation; that we deviate not from the way of the Lord; that in adversity, as in prosperity, we preserve equanimity and fortitude; and that God may never deprive us of His protection. Finally, we pray that God may crush satan beneath our feet.

Dispositions which should accompany this Petition

The pastor ought next to admonish the faithful concerning the chief thoughts and reflections that should accompany this prayer.

Distrust of self and confidence In God

It will, then, be found most efficacious, when offering this Petition that, remembering our weakness, we distrust our own strength; and that, placing all our hopes of safety in the Divine goodness and relying on the Divine protection, we encounter the greatest dangers with undaunted courage, calling to mind particularly the many persons, animated with such hope and resolution, who were delivered by God from the very jaws of satan.

When Joseph was assailed by the criminal solicitations of a wicked woman, [Genesis 39:7] did not God rescue him from the imminent danger, and exalt him to the highest degree of glory? Did He not preserve Susanna, when beset by the ministers of Satan, and on the point of being made the victim of an iniquitous sentence? Nor is this surprising; for her heart, says the Scripture, trusted in the Lord. [Daniel 13:35] How exalted the praise, how great the glory of Job, who triumphed over the world, the flesh and the devil! There are on record many similar examples to which the pastor should refer, in order to exhort with earnestness his pious hearers to this hope and confidence.

Remembrance of the Victory of Christ and His Saints

The faithful should also reflect Who is their Leader against the temptations of the enemy; namely, Christ the Lord, Who was victorious in the same combat. He overcame the devil; He is that stronger Man Who, coming upon the strong armed man, overcame him, deprived him of his arms, and stripped him of his spoils. Of Christ's victory over the world, we read in St. John: Have confidence: I have overcome the world; [John 16:33] and in the Apocalypse, He is called the conquering Lion; [Apocalypse 5:5] and it is said of Him that He went forth conquering that He might conquer, [Apocalypse 6:2] because by His victory He has given power to others to conquer.

The Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews abounds with the victories of holy men, who by faith conquered kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, etc. [Hebrews 11:33] While we read of such achievements, we should also take into account the victories which are every day won by men eminent for faith, hope and charity, in their interior and exterior conflicts with the demons, - victories so numerous and so signal, that, were we spectators of them, we should

deem no event of more frequent occurrence, none of more glorious issue. It was with reference to such defeats of the enemies that St. John wrote: I write unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. [1 John 2:14]

Watchfulness

Satan, however, is overcome not by indolence, sleep, wine, reveling, or lust; but by prayer, labor, watching, fasting, continence and chastity. Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation, as we have already said, [Matthew 26:41] is the admonition of Our Lord. They who make use of these weapons in the conflict put the enemy to flight; for the devil flees from those who resist him. [James 4:7]

The Author of victory over temptation

But from the consideration of these victories achieved by holy men which we have mentioned, let no one indulge feelings of self-complacency, nor flatter himself that, by his own single unassisted exertions, he is able to withstand the temptations and hostile assaults of the demons. This is not within the power of human nature, nor within the capacity of human frailty.

The strength by which we lay prostrate the satellites of satan comes from God, Who maketh our arms as a bow of brass; by Whose aid the bow of the mighty is overcome, and the weak are girt with strength; [1 Kings 2:4] Who giveth us the protection of salvation, Whose right hand upholdeth us: Who teacheth our hands to war, and our fingers to battle. [Psalm 17:35] Hence to God alone must thanks be given for victory, since it is only through His guidance and help that we are able to conquer. This the Apostle did; for he said: Thanks to God, Who hath given us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. [1 Corinthians 15:57] The voice from heaven, mentioned in the Apocalypse, also proclaims God to be the author of our victories: Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; because the accuser of our brethren is cast forth; and they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb." [Apocalypse 12:11] The same book declares that the victory obtained over the world and the flesh belongs to Christ the Lord, when it says: They shall fight with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them. [Apocalypse 17:14] But enough has now been said on the cause and the manner of conquering temptation.

The rewards of victories over temptation

When these things have been explained, the pastor should instruct the faithful concerning the crowns prepared by God, and the eternal and superabundant rewards reserved for those who conquer. He should quote from the Apocalypse the following Divine promises: He that shall overcome shall not be hurt by the second death; [Apocalypse 2:11] and in another place: He that shall overcome, shall thus be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels. [Apocalypse 3:5]

A little after, our Divine Lord Himself thus addresses John: He that shall overcome, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God: and he shall go out no more [Apocalypse 3:12] and again: To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My throne; as I also have overcome, and am set down with my Father in His throne. [Apocalypse 3:21] Finally, having unveiled the glory of the Saints, and the never ending bliss which they shall enjoy in heaven, He adds, He that shall overcome shall possess these things. [Apocalypse 21:7]

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