

## ***Bishop's Note: The Collects - First Sunday of Advent***



Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of San Joaquin - first allow me to wish you all a very Happy Thanksgiving. This is that secular and sacred feast in our land where with one accord families and friends sit down to give thanks to God for His many blessings! Of course for us as Anglican Christians we gather for "Thanksgiving" every Sunday as we celebrate Holy Eucharist which has its roots in the Greek - *εὐχαριστία* (eucharistia), meaning "thanksgiving," thus every Sunday celebration is a Thanksgiving.

This week I begin a new series in the Bishop's Note which will last a year and cover the entire of the church calendar. Each Sunday as we gather to make Thanksgiving (*εὐχαριστία*) the service begins with an opening prayer known as the "Collect." The Collect is a gathering prayer that very often sets the theme of the week's celebration from scripture. These collects date back to the earliest church but are most easily documented beginning in the fifth century. In the sixteenth century, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer used those fifth and sixth century collecting prayers to establish the collects for the church year that we find in the Book of Common Prayer. They were set in concrete, as it were, in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer that we still use as the foundation of our Anglican worship today.

These collects are beautiful - theologically, scripturally and poetically - some have argued that they capture the beauty and nuance of the English Language and did for English worship what Shakespeare did for English theater.

Beginning today, the Thursday prior to the First Sunday of Advent, and running through the season of Pentecost (also known as the Season after Trinity) we will be examining the collect for the coming Sunday. Because of Archbishop Cranmer's beautiful language I will most often but not exclusively use the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. I invite you to join me on this journey and to feel free to write me your own thoughts on the subjects the collects raise.

Collect for the First Sunday of Advent: ***"Almighty God, give us grace, that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in the which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the holy ghost now and ever. Amen."***

The season of Advent is a season of preparation - preparation for our death (or the 2nd Coming of Christ which ever comes first) and preparation to receive the incarnate Jesus born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

This preparation begins by seeking God's help to ***"cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."*** It is only by the help of God the Holy Spirit that we can in fact truly examine our lives and repent of our sin. (Mark 1:15) Repentance of sin alone is not enough - forgiven of sin we are vulnerable and so we are called to clothe ourselves in the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). This collect is clear to say that we need to repent and put on the armor of God in this Mortal Life - so often, people put off repenting and accepting Christ believing that there is still time...the problem is that not a one of us knows if we have 30 seconds or 30 years to live. It was to this very life that Jesus took on flesh - he who knew no sin became sin in order to redeem our lives so that we who are also flesh may join him in life immortal.

As we begin this season of Advent, we prepare for this life by repentance of sin and putting on the armor of God, and we prepare for the life to come by receiving Him who came in humility and rose to Glorious Majesty so that we may join him in God's good time!

God bless you all and Happy Thanksgiving!

Bishop Menees

## ***Bishop's Note: The Collects - Second Sunday of Advent***



In the first week of Advent we examined Archbishop Cranmer's collect, which called us to prepare for the coming of Christ either through our death or Jesus' Second Coming - which ever comes first. This preparation is vital to our life as Christians, and, in fact, we should live each day as if may be our last. Perhaps it is for this reason that Archbishop Cranmer recommended praying the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent each week of Advent.

In the collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, Archbishop Cranmer provides the compass for our daily preparation to meet the Lord. ***"Blessed Lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our savior Jesus Christ."***

A fundamental belief of Christians world-wide is that the Lord God did cause all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning. The Scriptures are God's self-revelation to man, providing us with an image of God and instructions on how we are to live our lives and love the Lord. St. Paul, under the inspiration of God, wrote to Timothy: ***"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

If we grant the primary premise that all Scripture comes from God and is intended for our learning, then the next step is all the more important - we pray that God will open our hearts and minds to have the discipline to ***"hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them."*** In other words, that the scriptures will become not simply something we hear read in church on Sunday, but that they will become a part of our lives. It is precisely through the development of a Scriptural World that we find comfort, peace, and hope. When we learn to examine the world through the lens of scripture, we understand better why it is that things happen, and, more importantly, what our response to the world around us should be!

For example: To the world around us, death is the worst thing that can happen. However, as biblical Christians, we understand that while death is a part of the Fall of Man, resurrection to New Life is the plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. We do not

know this intuitively; we learn it by reading, marking, and digesting the Word of God and sharing it with others.

As the Season of Advent draws to a close we will read the wonderful fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah chapter nine: ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;***

***and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."*** (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Let us pray with the Church that God will soften our hearts and open our minds to receive this Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God - whom we know to be Jesus Christ - and that we will allow His government to increase by submitting to Him and allowing Jesus' governance over our lives. This will and can happen daily, if we but pray regularly the Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent.

God Bless you all!

Bishop Menees

## ***Bishop's Note: The Collects - Third Sunday of Advent***



Last week in the Bishop's Note it became obvious that the collects of Archbishop Cranmer can be found in different orders, depending on whether you are using the 1662, 1928, or 1979 editions of the Book of Common Prayer. As such, it seems to make the most sense for me to change course slightly and use the order of Collects found in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, since that is the prayer book commonly used in the diocese at the moment.

That being the case, let's examine the Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent: ***Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honor, and glory, world without end. Amen.***

That first sentence speaks to a theological reality that gives us hope and comfort! Though Jesus was born of Mary 2000 years ago, suffered, was crucified, died, and rose again by his great might and power, he is just as present with us in 2013 as he was with his disciples in the upper room on that first Easter night! He does this by his mighty power and great love, even though we do not deserve his presence or mercy - recognizing that we are indeed, "sorely hindered by our sins."

We are hindered by our sins, continuously failing in the way that St. Paul so eloquently stated in Romans: ***"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."*** (Romans 7:15) During this Advent Season, it is good to remember that we are hindered by our sins...but it is also good to remember that Jesus is the very essence of Grace and Mercy, and is ready to "speedily help and deliver us."

Think of that for a moment: The Lord of the universe - the very being who spoke everything into existence - is always ready to deliver us, with mercy and love, from both our sin and the wrath of God that is justly due to us for our sin. Absolutely mind boggling!

And, of course, it is not just Jesus who comes to our aid, but the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - who are willing and able to come to our aid and assistance. In doing so, God brings honor and glory to himself. How amazing and loving God is, both *to* us and *for* us.

In this third week of Advent, we are reminded of both the Law and God's Grace! The Law is transgressed by our sin, and God's Grace transforms us from blind and bewildered sinners into instruments of His Honor and Glory!

A blessed Advent to you all!

Bishop Menees

## ***Bishop's Note: The Collects - Fourth Sunday of Advent***



The Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Advent:

***"We beseech thee, Almighty God, to purify our consciences by thy daily visitation, that when thy Son our Lord cometh he may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."***

This collect calls the church to the difficult and important task of inviting Christ to, "...purify our consciences by thy daily visitation." Archbishop Cranmer knew of our need for that daily purification; that daily examination; that daily conviction of the Holy Spirit. I say this is difficult, because it is difficult for me to not only allow (passive) but to invite (active) God to convict me of sin. This is difficult because I prefer to rationalize and say that all is well. The problem is that all is not well. Unless and until I am willing to accept responsibility for my actions, and to receive God's Grace in purifying me, I cannot move forward in my spiritual growth and development. Give and take - that is the ticket. I give my life to the Lord, my whole life - good and bad - and allow him to have his way with me. In that way, whether I meet the Lord via my death or his second coming, I am prepared to meet him and, equally important, there is room in my heart and life for him both now and in the future!

As we approach Christmas Day, just six days away, the excitement and anticipation is rising. This is true whether you are five or ninety-five: the celebration of the anniversary of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a tremendous event. I recall as a boy those Christmas mornings when I would wait with baited breath to hear my parents stirring, giving me the signal that it was OK to go downstairs to find out what was under the Christmas Tree.

As a child, it was all about me and what I would receive at Christmas. As I grew older, I discovered the truth of Jesus' words: **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** However, to receive the fullest meaning of Jesus' words, we should look at that quote in its context. St. Paul is on his third missionary journey, and he's called the elders of Ephesus together to share with them the work he's done as an example for them. As always, St. Paul doesn't use his ministry as the highest example, but rather that of Jesus. Here is the whole quote from Acts 20:35: ***"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"***

We are called to pour out ourselves for Jesus by helping those who are weak and alone, and in doing so we receive such a blessing.

Years ago I was the chaplain at The Bishop's School in San Diego. A requirement of the school was for students to do a certain number of service hours each semester, and to complete a specific number of hours in order to graduate. Often, kids would grumble and complain, and many seniors still needed a lot of hours in order to fulfill their requirements. To assist them, I would lead a weekend long service project in Tijuana working with orphans and the poor. Kids would moan and groan about working, but then as we were crossing the boarder coming back, I'd take the time to debrief the weekend with them. No student ever said: "Man, I regret helping those orphans or working with people in need." Why? Because it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive.

A blessed Advent to you all!

Bishop Menees



## ***Bishop's Note: The Collects - First Sunday of Christmas***



This Sunday we celebrate the First Sunday of Christmas and open our service with this collect:

***Almighty God, who hast poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word: Grant that the same light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.***

Merry Christmas! What beautiful words and what a blessed and holy celebration we had as we began a new Church season on Tuesday evening at the Midnight Mass - the Season of Christmas. This is the shortest season of the Church year at just twelve days, but what beautiful days they are - dedicated not only to the memory of Jesus' birth but the reality of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, in our lives today.

That is the theological principle that Archbishop Cranmer was putting forth in today's collect. I love the imagery used here: God in his glory, pouring down his light in his Son Jesus - the Incarnate Word. When received, this light will shine like a beacon in the darkness. We, his adopted children, are called to shine forth that light to those who are lost and alone.

This week I saw a beautiful example of that, when our office assistant, (and soon to be new administrator) Corey McLaughlin, met with a group of homeless people who were making a camp in the bushes at the Cathedral. Corey met with them, offered prayer, respectfully set limits with them, and encouraged them on their way. This was an example of love, respect, and Christian charity. In other words, he shared the light of Christ with them as it shone through his actions.

In the Diocese of San Joaquin, we see this happen in a thousand ways day in and day out - with parishioners, the sick, those who are lost in sin, and those who have lost their way. When members of a congregation reach out to the elderly and the lonely, the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, we are living out what the collect calls us to do as Christmas people.

May God bless you and may you have a very Merry Christmas!

## Bishop's Note: The Collects - Second Sunday of Christmas



This Sunday is January 5th, the 12th and last day of Christmas - did your true love give you twelve drummers drumming? Neither did my true love. However, on December 30th we managed to make it over to the coast to celebrate our 24th wedding anniversary - what a blessing!

Anyhow, back to the task at hand: the collect for the Second Sunday of Christmas. To the best of my knowledge, which is not much, Archbishop Cranmer did not write a collect for the Second Sunday of Christmas, trusting that the two collects for the Feast of the Incarnation - which he required to be read on each of the twelve days of Christmas - would suffice. Thus, the following collect was added to the 1928 BCP: **ALMIGHTY God, who hast poured upon us the new light of thine incarnate Word; Grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.** The 1979 BCP changed the collect again. I cannot speculate upon why they changed the collect, but one can see that with the 1979 BCP, a subtle but significant change in the theology of the Episcopal Church USA began to take shape. Rather than an emphasis upon the Birth of Jesus, the 1979 BCP places the emphasis on a restored dignity of humanity - moving the emphasis away from God and on to us. Here is the collect for this Sunday in the 1979 BCP:

### *Second Sunday after Christmas Day*

*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

It is true that God created all humanity (Genesis 1:26-27) in his "image and likeness," and that thus all people are deserving of respect and dignity. Respect for human life and dignity of every human being is a hallmark characteristic of Christianity, and not necessarily of other religions. However, it is important to remember that WE are NOT God, but only created in his likeness. Theologians have long pondered what it means to be created in the image and likeness of God, and most have come to the conclusion, as have I, that this means we are endowed by our Creator with certain attributes that come from God and separate us from the rest of creation. This list is in no way exhaustive, but for example: the ability to **create** - not just to build things, but artistic creation;

**intelligence** - the ability to think of someone else beyond ourselves and to understand God's creation around us as he reveals it to us; **self-sacrifice** - giving of ourselves for a greater good, being willing to go beyond our families and kindred to sacrifice even our very lives for others who are innocent (think of the police officer or firefighter who runs into harms way for people they do not know); and perhaps most importantly, the ability to **love** as the Lord defined it in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 "***Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***"

In so far as this collect leads us towards the fulfillment of what it means to be created in the image of God, I rejoice. However, I am also a bit fearful, because what many mainline denominations are leading toward is the false belief that **we** are divine, which is just not true. There is a Creator and the created, and we are part of the created - it is absolutely crucial for our salvation and our own human dignity to remember that fact. Yes, scripture teaches us that our bodies can be "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19) for those who invite God the Holy Spirit in, but that is very different from being divine - the desire for which is at the root of the fall of both our first parents and ourselves. (Genesis 3)

My prayer for you and myself this Second Sunday of Christmas, is that we will so embrace the Holy Spirit and the birth of Jesus, that our lives will daily reflect the Love, Grace, and Redemption found in that little child who was born so that he may die, and whose death was for our birth.

Merry Christmas to you all!

Bishop Menees

## Bishop's Note: The Collect for the First Sunday after the Epiphany



A happy and blessed Epiphany to you all! What an action packed few weeks we've had with the Feast of the Incarnation (Christmas), St. Stephen's Day, St. John's Day, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, The Feast of the Circumcision, The Feast of the Epiphany, and now, in this first Sunday after the Epiphany, we have the Baptism of Jesus.

This day is especially important to me, in that I was baptized on this date at age 14 in 1975 (yes that puts me at age 52 today - half way to 104!). I prepared for baptism with four weeks of instruction from a truly-believing lay woman, who was the first person to disciple me in the faith. I invited my family and friends to come to church. There I was, dressed in a suit and sitting in the front row. The service was beautiful. We had communion, and I kept waiting for the priest to invite me up for the baptism. He didn't, and at the door as he was greeting people, I asked him if I had gotten the date wrong. His face reddened, and he called people back into the church, where about twenty of the faithful gathered around the font (which the Altar Guild had dutifully prepared) and I publicly renounced Satan and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior! A bit anticlimatic, but there we go.

Fortunately, Archbishop Cranmer was much more intentional than Fr. Bob was about discipleship! Here is the collect for this Sunday:

***Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan didst proclaim him thy beloved Son and anoint him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with thee and the same Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, in glory everlasting.***

***Amen.***

The collect begins by affirming the biblical narrative found in the gospels of Matthew (Mt. 3:13-17), Mark (Mk 1:9-11), and Luke (Lk 3:21-23), where God declares Jesus to be his beloved Son, as well as in the gospel of John (Jn 1:29-33), in which John the Baptist testifies to the event. In an age where scripture is consistently challenged for accuracy, it is nice to know that Archbishop Cranmer had no doubt as to the truth of scripture. And this Sunday, as we pray this collect, the accuracy of the biblical story is reaffirmed!

Just as His baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, so too our public ministry is affirmed in this collect. "Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made..." Our public ministry begins and ends in obedience to the promises and vows made to God in our baptism...can you imagine what the church would look like if all baptized Christians really lived out that covenant? What is that covenant? Simply put: First, it is a clearly articulated faith in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Secondly, it is a promise to continue in the Apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. (Acts 2)

Archbishop Cranmer clearly stated that our right belief (Orthodoxy) will lead to right action (Orthopraxy), when the very next statement in the collect is: "...and boldly confess him [Jesus] as Lord and Savior." It is not enough to simply believe, but we must proclaim to the world the reality of Jesus as Lord and Savior. The world around us is quick to accept Jesus as an historical figure and a great teacher of peace. We affirm that belief, but we must go much further and state that he is God incarnate!

Of course, Archbishop Cranmer also recognized that this task is impossible without the Holy Spirit. In my baptism, even though Fr. Bob nearly forgot to do it, the Holy Spirit did not forget to show up loud and clear. My life changed after receiving the sacrament of baptism. What I had done privately - accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior - was now publicly affirmed. Equally important, the Church also promised to disciple me and support me in my public and private life in Christ! Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the support and discipline of the church, amazing things began to happen. My life has been transformed, as have been the lives of countless others, all because we affirm the biblical truth of Jesus' baptism and ministry, and Jesus' support of our own baptism and ministry!

Let us pray that the Church will take to heart this call to right belief and right action! And to that I say...AMEN!

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

## Bishop's Note: The Collect for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany



The liturgical season we are in is known as Epiphany (meaning to make manifest), but really it should be called the season of Epiphanies, because each week, through the scriptures, we see how Jesus was made manifest. Last week we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus, and through the scriptures we saw the dove alight upon Jesus and the voice of God come from the heavens, ***"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*** (Matthew 3:17). Imagine if you were present at that baptism, hearing those words from heaven...it gives me goose bumps just to think about it.

This week, Jesus is similarly called out, as it were, when John the Baptist, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, cries out to the crowd and the world... ***"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29) People would have either thought him to be a serious nut case, or by the look on his face and the reverential tone in his voice, known that they'd come into the presence of the Holy One of Israel!

Who was it that first pointed you to Jesus as the Lamb of God? For me, it was my grandfather. I remember the prayers that he prayed before the family sat down to Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter Dinner. He spoke with such an odd combination of reverence and familiarity, that even as a young boy I remember thinking, "I don't know who he's talking to, but he is obviously important in grandpa's life."

My grandfather didn't evangelize exactly, but he did, in a quiet and confident way, point me toward God and ask the questions that would be answered in a few years when my friend Bob La Mar invited me to church.

Who invited you to church? Who pointed you to Jesus as the Lamb of God? This week's Collect implores God to open our hearts and minds to His Son, the eternal light, through His Word (Holy Scripture) and the Sacraments. My prayer for you, and my prayer for me, is that we will be looking for God the Holy Spirit to open us up to new and fresh perspectives on our Lord, which then, indeed, will lead us to share with others the light of Christ and to invite others to worship the Risen Lord!

Let us pray...

**"Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that thy people, illumined by thy Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever." Amen.**

Bishop Menees



***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany***



***"Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***

Do you remember how you first received the call to ministry? When I say ministry here, I am referring to the ministry of all believers and not just those who are ordained. You'll recall from Sunday School or your Catechism class that all baptized Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are ministers in the church.

I remember, from my own baptismal preparation, how Miss Marge - one of the saints of the church - taught us that in our baptism we would receive the Holy Spirit, who would empower us for ministry. I remember being very excited and thinking that God would somehow speak to me personally, saying something like, ***"Eric, I want you to be a professional baseball player - in fact, you'll be the third baseman for the California Angels."*** (Remember, I was just 14.) Unfortunately, God didn't call me to my childhood dream. Rather, he spoke to me in quiet ways through the brothers and sisters of the church, my friends, and ultimately my own desires and talents.

Fr. David, our curate and youth minister, began to notice that I was particularly drawn to the sacraments of the church. Soon after my baptism, I would get up early on Sunday morning and ride my bike to church in order to attend the 8:00 o'clock service, and then I would stay for the 10:00 o'clock service to see my friends. Before long, he was inviting me to become an acolyte. I loved the liturgy and serving at the altar. I learned that I could work with the adults and the teens, and began to take on leadership in training new acolytes. One thing lead to another, and people began to notice that my interest was in serving at the altar and serving people, so I was invited to assist with our service projects and leadership in the youth group. The summer before my senior year in High School, Fr. David invited me to shadow him on hospital visits where I learned that I had a natural ability to minister to those who were sick, and before I knew it, I was trained and volunteering as a hospital visitor. That summer, as we would debrief after visits, Fr. David shared with me, "Eric, I suspect you've thought about it, but I believe you are called to be a priest in the church." When Fr. David said that, two things rushed over me: a sense of fear and foreboding that I wasn't worthy to be a priest, and the sure and certain knowledge that he was right - I was called to be a priest.

This week's Collect asks the Lord to give us the Grace to answer Jesus' call. Ultimately, that is the only way we can answer the call of God upon our lives - by submitting to the Holy Spirit and His prompting. Too often, we cut His Spirit off in that call. We tell ourselves: Ministry is for other people; I'm not good enough - ministers are the holy rollers; I'll get around to that after I finish school, get married, get settled in my work, the kids get older, the kids move out....you fill in the blank.

Thankfully, the disciples didn't rationalize or question Jesus' call upon their lives - they simply followed. My prayer is that this week you will pray this Collect in preparation for Sunday's worship, asking the Lord to open your heart and mind to hear and understand what ministry he's placing upon your heart. If you rise to this challenge, I promise that the Lord will speak to you. It may be through the scriptures, the sermon, the priest or deacon, or a friend; but he will surely speak if you listen, pray, and then listen some more!

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany***



***Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and in our time grant us thy peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.***

***Amen.***

This week's Collect goes back to basics, but they are the very basics that we must go back to again, and again, and again, because we mostly don't understand it - or believe it. I realize I shouldn't use such a broad generalization however twenty seven years of ministry and almost forty years as a Christian have taught me that, while we will often state that we believe that God really is in charge and "governs all things in heaven and earth," we don't really live in a way that demonstrates that understanding and belief. Equally, we too often don't live in a way that demonstrates a belief that God really does hear and answer all of our prayers.

What would our lives look like if we really lived with the sure and certain hope of God's being in charge? Well for one thing, we'd be a lot less anxious wouldn't we? Jesus said that we should not be anxious about our lives - what we will eat or what we will wear - that God provides for the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. (Luke 12:22-34) Jesus says that we should not be anxious about our lives, because our Father in heaven has already taken care of things. St. Paul makes a similar statement in his letter to the Philippians: ***"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."*** (Philippians 4:6)

I know that the anxieties I feel in my own life are often associated with really wondering if God can take care of things. Worries about providing for my family creep in sometimes, and yet time and time again my life experience teaches me that God always provides one way or another. Sometimes I'm anxious because I want both to honor God, and not to look foolish or embarrass the Diocese of San Joaquin or the Anglican Church in North America. That was true this past weekend when I gave the opening invocation at the Walk for Life West Coast. Speaking before 60,000 people was new for me and, if I'm honest, I was anxious - that anxiety was, in part, my not giving things over to Jesus and trusting that he's in charge. Needless to say, he came through and I did not trip and fall on my face - physically or metaphorically.

This is not to say that this kind of faith is simply fatalistic. Far from it! Because we are believers in Jesus Christ, we know that he's given us ministries and responsibilities to represent him in a fallen and broken world. That means that we need to pick ourselves up and, in faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, head out to do what we are called to do. That's what I did this weekend - put one step before the other and trusted that God would cover it. And you know what? He did!

The second half of the Collect calls us to trust that God really does hear and answer our prayers - every one of them. Great sadness has come over me throughout the years when I've spoken to people in difficult times and they've responded, "Oh I haven't prayed about this...I couldn't bother God with such trivia," or "I save my prayers for the big things," or "God really doesn't answer individual prayer, he answers collective prayers." What sad statements these are, because they go contrary to the teaching of Jesus: ***"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."*** (Luke 11:9-10)

Some years ago I heard a pastor explain it this way: God hears and answers every prayer we offer. The answer is always one of three: "Yes," "No," or "Not yet." That really resonates with me, because I do see the result of prayer daily. That which has been broken down is risen up; that which is old has been made new; the sick are healed - the list can go on and on. The problem doesn't come when God answers our prayers with "Yes." The problem is when he answers our prayers with "No" or "Not yet."

My 13 year old son, when he asks for something and we say "No," has a habit of immediately responding: "Why not?" Expected, perhaps, of a 13 year old, but how often do we all do that with God? We pray for something, we don't see immediate results, and we say, "Why not, God...you must not really exist, or you don't care about me if you do." In fact, the contrary is true: God, like my wife and I when we say "No" to our son, has our best interests in mind when he says "No" or "Not yet" to us.

This Collect calls upon us to have faith, hope, and trust in God, with the understanding that he really is in charge and really does want to give us the very best. As Jesus said: ***"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*** (Luke 11:11-13) And to that I say...AMEN!

God Bless You All!

Bishop Menees

## **Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Epiphany**



This week's Collect speaks to the freedom and grace that can only be found in Jesus Christ, and which stands in opposition to the world around us. The world around us tries to argue that there really is no sin - just poor choices. They argue that we are already free, saying, "We are not sinners in need of salvation; we are children of God who simply need correction and guidance." The doctrine of original sin has been replaced by the philosophical construct that we are simply a tabula rasa - a blank slate. Being neither really good nor really bad, we simply need good parenting by a culture that is willing to take us by the hand and lead us to some sort of government sponsored utopia.

I believe that, at our core, we really know we are not a tabula rasa - we are fallen; selfish by nature; wanting what we want, when we want it. I often use the following example. Picture two lovely children from lovely families and homes. They are both placed into a room that is light, and warm, and comfortable. There is no furniture in the room they are in; they are alone save for two objects in the center of the room: a lovely, shiny, colorful toy and a fork. One child gets the toy, and one child gets the fork. How long do you think it will take for the child with the fork to realize that with the use of the fork he can have the toy as well? Do you know any very young child who would set down the fork and say, "Oh please, you play with the toy, and when you are done perhaps you'll allow me to play with it?" Or can you imagine the other very young child with the toy saying, "Gosh this seems to be unfair; please, you take the toy and I'll wait until you are done playing?"

That child does not exist, because in our nature we are sinners in need of salvation. Those children grow up and, no matter how lovely and kind they are, they, like all of us, have a sinful side - a side that seeks power and immediate gratification.

This Collect asks God to set us free from the power of sin, free from the grip of our selfish nature, and free to find our true freedom in the boundaries of a life in Christ.

***Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us, we beseech thee, the liberty of that abundant life which thou hast manifested to us in thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.***

You see here the abundant life that Jesus desires for us and which he promised in John 10:10 - "***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.***" Abundant life is available to us who place our lives, our faith,

and our trust in Jesus Christ. The thief, Satan, comes to us in the voice of a culture that says we are perfect just the way we are. The issue isn't our sin, it is our failure to accept the divine within us. The Lie of Satan is attractive and tempting, but does not lead to freedom. Instead, it leads to our bondage to the passions of our natural, sinful lives.

The good news is that when we pray this prayer with a true and contrite heart, God hears and responds. Jesus died on the cross so that we can be saved from the penalty of our sin, and so that we may be freed from the chains of sin that bind us down.

Thanks be to God for His love that comes to us and sets us free. And to that I say...AMEN

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Epiphany***



This Collect is one of those beautiful collects, prayed by Archbishop Cranmer, that reflects both its, and our, Catholic and Protestant roots.

Like so many of the Collects, this prayer for the Sixth Sunday in Epiphany is counter cultural. The culture tells us that we are strong and sufficient and good. That's what the culture tells us, but experience and the Word of God both tell us the opposite: we are not strong, but weak; we are not sufficient, but dependent; we are not good, but wicked. Archbishop Cranmer knew all of this, and so he prayed that God would act, as is His nature, counter-culturally!

***O God, the strength of all who put their trust in thee: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature, we can do no good thing without thee, give us the help of thy grace, that in keeping thy commandments we may please thee both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.***

***Amen.***

First, when we pray this prayer, we acknowledge that any strength we have comes, not from within ourselves, but from God. This is a hard lesson to learn because our nature is fallen and we try to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, as it were. But that is a false understanding, because any strength we have is given to us by God, and by Him alone.

Secondly, in this prayer we acknowledge that our weakness is bound to our mortal nature - we will, all of us, die. As much as we try to put that out of our minds or even to deny it outright, the fact is that we could take our last breath in thirty seconds or in thirty or sixty years - but we will, all of us, die.

Thirdly, because of our inability to help ourselves and because of our fallen nature, even if we could, we would not use that strength to honor God. Therefore, we must humble ourselves to rely upon God and His Grace in order to obey Him and His Word.

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees



## Bishop's Note: Collect for the Seventh Sunday in Epiphany



*O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

This Collect of Archbishop Cranmer is as beautiful as it is convicting and challenging. Archbishop Cranmer challenges the church with four different things.

First, he acknowledges before The Lord that all of our works and actions, if they are done without Charity, are for naught. It is interesting that the Archbishop used the term "Charity" rather than "Love," which he uses in other collects. Charity can be translated as love, but really has a larger meaning than that. Charity, in its broadest sense, includes love of God as well as love of man. In other words, it is the love of the Great Commandment - Matthew 22:36-40.

Secondly, this collect acknowledges that Charity is a gift from God that comes as an anointing of the Holy Spirit. No matter how hard we try, we cannot infuse the gift of Charity - this love of God and man - into ourselves by sheer will power or desire. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is so much more than a thought or a feeling - it is a virtue.

Thirdly, Archbishop Cranmer implores God the Holy Spirit to give this gift of Charity to us, which we experience passively as peace and actively as a virtue. This peace, or Shalom, is what St. Paul promised for those who rejoice in the Lord in his epistle to the Philippians, "[7] ***And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***" (Philippians 4:7 ESV) This Shalom is so much more than the absence of violence or strife in our lives - it is the active presence of the Holy Spirit! It is that very presence of the Holy Spirit that leads us to actively love. The virtue of Charity calls us to go beyond ourselves to care for another as an expression of our love for God, and to love God as an expression of our love for man. It is that beautiful interrelationship - the dance with God - that Archbishop Cranmer desires for us, the People of God.

Fourthly, Archbishop Cranmer desires this for us because he knows that, without it, we are dead. Dead in sin, dead in self, and dead in the world. You see, one of the great deceptions of the devil is the idea that if we embrace the world - if we seek all the "gusto" in life - we are, in fact alive. But that is only a deception. The more we embrace the world the more we sin, and the more we sin the more callous we become to the things of the Spirit. That is why St. Paul argues that we are to die to sin and be raised to new life in Jesus Christ. ***"How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*** (Romans 6:2-4 ESV)

This collect speaks to the reality that we are either alive or dead, living in Grace or dying to sin. Satan tries to tell us - and we try to tell ourselves this too - that there is this gray area where it's enough just to be nice, isn't it? It's enough just to not harm others, isn't it?

The answer to that is, NO! Our Lord Jesus looks to us with the eyes of compassion and perfect understanding, and says to you and to me, "I love you!" Our answer to that can only be made through the power of the Holy Spirit: "I love you, Lord. Please allow my life to demonstrate that love."

My prayer for you and my prayer for me is that our lives will demonstrate our answer to Jesus. And to that I say... AMEN.

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees



*O God, who before the passion of thy only-begotten Son didst reveal his glory upon the holy mount: Grant unto us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

It is hard to believe that Epiphany has almost passed and that we are hard on the heels of the Season of Lent - a season marked with drama, sacrifice and passion. As we enter this incredible and beautiful drama, it seems that the scene is set with type of a prologue - the Transfiguration of our Lord. Drawn from the 17th Chapter of Matthew, we journey with Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray with Jesus. There, he is transfigured before our eyes, as St. Matthew says: **"...his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light."** (Mt. 17:2) In this glimpse of Jesus on the mount, we are blessed to see, with the disciples, a fuller revelation of Jesus' divine nature. We, like the disciples, cannot see God face to face, for we would be overwhelmed by his grandeur and grace. I think of Moses in the book of Exodus, whom God allowed to see him for a split second - and even then it was only his back as he passed by. (Exodus 33:18 ff)

On the mount with Peter, James, and John, not only do we see a fraction of Jesus' divinity, but we are also blessed to see Moses and Elijah standing along side of Jesus - representing the fact that Jesus was and is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets!

Unlike the three disciples, we are not only free to proclaim what we have seen on the Mount of Transfiguration, but we are required to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ by telling the world that he was not simply a "good man" or a "moral teacher," but rather God Incarnate!

Equally, the collect reminds us that we are not yet in the promised land - until Jesus returns again, we are required to pick up our cross and follow him. We can do so because we know in the depth of our being who Jesus is, what he has done, and what lies ahead in Glory.

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

*"And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for IEljah." 5 He was still speaking when, behold, ma bright cloud overshadowed them, and ma voice from the cloud said, n"This is my beloved Son, I with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and shave no fear." 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

*9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead." (Matthew 17: 1-9 ESV)*



This week, we began the Season of Lent with the beautiful and fearful service of Ash Wednesday. In that service we were reminded of The Fall and, as a result, of our mortality, with the imposition of ashes and the statement: *"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."* These words are taken from Genesis 3:19... ***"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."***

In the Ash Wednesday Liturgy, we were also invited to the practice of keeping a Holy Lent through self-denial and self-discipline. In the midst of these practices, Satan loves to come to us and tempt us. Isn't it amazing that we may decide to give up the television in order to spend more time in prayer, and all of a sudden we are plagued with thoughts about how much we like this or that show, sports game, or news cast? Almost immediately, the rationalizations come to our minds: "Sports isn't really watching TV, it's enjoying a game...or the news...I've got to keep up on events and the weather." Satan is the Father of all Lies (John 8:44), and his voice can sound exactly like ours in the midst of temptation.

It is for this reason that we must call upon the Holy Spirit to assist us in the midst of our temptations. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are victorious in our decision to deny ourselves and live for Christ. St. Paul, in writing to his young apprentice Timothy, said: ***"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."*** (2 Timothy 1:6-7)

This week's Collect, though not original to Archbishop Cranmer, reminds us that we are powerful in The Lord, but that we need to "fan into flame the gift of God," which is the Holy Spirit. In him we should have no fear, and we must trust in his power, which is made manifest in love AND self-control. And so, it is with confidence that we pray this collect for the first week of Lent, as we begin our fasts and our disciplines of prayer, scripture reading, and service.

***Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and***

*for ever.*

*Amen.*

## Bishop's Note: Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent



*O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from thy ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of thy Word, Jesus Christ thy Son; who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

This beautiful collect for the Second Sunday in Lent addresses many of the realities that we live with daily, whether or not we acknowledge them.

First, the collect is addressed to God whose chief characteristic is **MERCY**. This is not mercy simply for others - it is mercy for me and for you! Christianity stands apart from all other religions because of God's willingness to suffer for His creation. Mercy is defined by Miriam Webster's Dictionary as: *"compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power."* Our God is a God of mercy and compassion, because not only has He chosen not to give us the punishment we deserve, but he has also chosen to have compassion on - that is, to suffer with - us. In taking on human form and substance, and then suffering the wrath of God on our behalf - what theologians refer to as Substitutional Atonement - God has demonstrated His mercy. Awesome! God's mercy is also shown in his decision to adopt us as His sons and daughters. As the prologue to the Gospel of John so beautifully states it: ***"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*** (John 1:12-13)

Second, this collect petitions God to extend his Grace to all who have gone astray from His ways. That petition is for each and every one of us as the descendants of Adam.

Isaiah acknowledges this fact: ***"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*** (Isaiah 53:6) Isaiah prophesied to a stiff necked people, and we have to count ourselves among them. The acknowledgement that we have gone astray is absolutely essential to enjoying God's mercy. We tend live with the illusion that we are perfect just the way we are - that we set the rules, and as long as we are not actively hurting another person, we are doing just fine. That may be true based on man's law, but not on God's law. Jesus set the bar with the Great Commandment, and not a one of us has been able to consistently follow that law - Lord have Mercy!

Finally, this collect asks God to direct us back to Him and help us to hold fast to the truth of His unchangeable Word - Jesus Christ. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to seek after, learn from, and cling to Jesus. This Season of Lent, we have an opportunity to "...embrace and hold fast to the unchangeable truth..." of Jesus Christ our Lord through scripture reading, prayer, worship, fasting, and self-denial. I invite you to join me in saying this prayer - thanking God for his Mercy and asking His assistance in repenting and returning to the Lord!

God blessed Lent to you all!

Bishop Menees



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent**



*Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

On Lent One, Fr. Tony Faint at St. Timothy's, Bishop, began his sermon by quoting step one of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous: "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable." Fr. Faint's point was that we must admit that, without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are powerless over sin in our lives.

The collect for the Third Sunday of Lent makes the same point - that we have no power within ourselves to help ourselves overcome sin in our lives. Of course, this is not a new thought - it dates back to the first century, with St. Paul admitting to God, himself, and the people of the Church in Rome: ***"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."*** (Romans 7:15) Admitting that we have no power to help ourselves is absolutely necessary for our salvation. When we live with the illusion that we have the power to help ourselves, then we never need God! So the scriptures teach us that we have no power to help ourselves, and therefore we need to turn to God.

The service of Reconciliation begins with this very admittance:

*Penitent*

Bless me, for I have sinned.

*The Priest says*

The Lord be in your heart and upon your lips that you may truly and humbly confess your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

*Penitent*

I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially \_\_\_\_\_. " (BCP pg. 447)

Precisely because we are powerless to help ourselves, we must seek Him who is all powerful - The Lord God Almighty - for our protection and for our forgiveness. Thanks be to God, we are loved beyond our wildest imaginations by Jesus Christ, who willingly suffered and died that the veil may be torn in two and the chasm between God and man may be bridged.

And so we pray to Him for protection - protection from the enemy and the father of all lies, and for protection against our own weakness to see through those lies; lies like, "You don't need God," or "God doesn't make junk, so you are perfect just the way you are."

My prayer for you and for me this Third Sunday in Lent is that we will not rely upon ourselves, but upon Jesus Christ - and Him alone - for our salvation, forgiveness, and protection. And to that I say... AMEN

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent**



*Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which giveth life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*

*Amen.*

This collect begins with the acknowledgement that God is our "Gracious Father." He is the very essence of fatherhood - we only know a good father or a wanting father due to the fact that we have a good and gracious Father in heaven.

For many in other religions, this is a very offensive concept - that God could be referred to as our Father. Within Orthodox Judaism it is still considered near blasphemy to pronounce the name of God - God is known through His word and through His creation, but is not a personable being. Within Islam, God or Allah is impersonal and unknowable. Equally within eastern religions, God is a disembodied force that one seeks to align with but cannot be known nor know you.

For Christians the title of Father implies exactly what it means - that God desires both to be known and to know us as His adopted sons and daughters. How amazing it is to know that the God of the Universe - the God who spoke the stars and planets into existence - also chose to adopt us as His children! *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* (John 1:12-13)

As a human father desires the very best for his children, so too our Heavenly Father desires the very best for us, His adopted children. Jesus speaks directly to this when he taught the disciples: *"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11:11-13)

Even beyond our Heavenly Father's desire to provide for us, He desires to be so deeply known to us that we abide in Him and He in us. Listen to this collect: "***Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which giveth life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him....***" God sent his son to be the Bread of Life: "***Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'***" (John 6:35) These images of bread and water are powerful ones - they are the very stuff of life. Jesus taught us to pray: "***Give us this day our daily bread....***," (Luke 11:3) - give us Jesus daily, that we may live, for nothing can satisfy or delight as much as the Bread of Life.

How awesome it is for us, when we come to the altar on the Lord's day - or any day - and kneel down, make the sign of the cross, and place our hands out to receive the Bread of Life - the body of Christ. How thrilling it is to know, in the depth of our being, that Christ is present in some mystical way in that bread, and that when receiving Him we are being obedient to His command: "***Take, eat, this is my body given for you....***," (Matthew 26:26) and that His desire is to be with us.

As a priest and bishop, it remains my greatest honor to celebrate Holy Eucharist - to look into the eyes of a believer and, while placing the consecrated bread into their hands or upon their tongue, say, "***The body of Christ, the bread of Heaven***" or "***The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.***"

I pray that, as we approach the depth of Lent and the height of Easter, we will always desire: "***Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him....***" And to that I say... AMEN!

I pray you all a very blessed Lent!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for Lent Five**

On this, the last Sunday in Lent, the collect is a beautiful prayer that asks God to work in us to transform our character.



***O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: Grant unto thy people that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.***

***Amen.***

First, this collect acknowledges that we really have no power within ourselves, but that God, who is "Almighty," has the ability to "order" our "unruly wills and affections." Isn't it amazing that when we try by the power of our own might to change habits and character flaws, we fall short? Well, let me speak for myself: I find it impossible to change my habits and character flaws! However, I am not the same man today as I was three, or ten, or twenty years ago, because of the power of the Holy Spirit working within me. While not completely ordered, to be sure, God is transforming my will and affections, and I thank him for that!

Secondly, this collect asks God to change us to love what he commands and desire what he promises. When we can align our hearts and minds to that of God, we find ourselves truly blessed. King David speaks of this often in the psalms...

***"Blessed is the man***

***who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,***

***nor stands in the way of sinners,***

***nor sits in the seat of scoffers;***

*but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.”*

(Psalm 1:1-2)

I often experience the blessing that David speaks of because I truly desire to do God's will. The issue for me isn't in loving his commands or desiring his promises. Rather, it is in acting on that love and desire. The words of St. Paul in his epistle to the Church in Rome ring so true for me and, I suspect, for most of you as well: ***“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”*** (Romans 7:15) This collect asks God, in his mercy, not only to help us love and desire these things but to do them!

Lastly, this collect recognizes that we need God to work this way in our lives if we are going to be able to adapt and excel in a dynamic world that is constantly changing. Sometimes it can be overwhelming, watching the world change at a pace that is much faster than our own. But, by God's grace, we are able to “roll with the punches.” I think the key is to keep our eyes on God - the one who is unchangeable, all powerful, all knowing, and all loving! And to that I say Amen!

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: The Collect for Passion Sunday also known as Palm Sunday



This weeks collect opens up Holy Week for us in a powerful way.

Passion Sunday is full of just that - passion and suffering - in particular the suffering of Jesus. I remember as a young man in high school, our youth group would often put the passion narrative into a play setting in which we would dramatically read the parts...I know, nothing new... but I've got to say that as I read the part of the narrator, or the guards, or Jesus the words came alive for me.

In preparation, the youth group would spend time studying the passion narrative in the gospels, and on more than one occasion I found myself weeping. That seems to me an appropriate response when we not only think about Jesus' suffering, but also about whom he suffered for - namely me and you!

*Almighty and everliving God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

As we enter into Holy Week, this Collect asks God, who sent His son to suffer for us, to help us become more like him, and that He will give us patience to stay the course with Jesus as we are invited into the Living Word.

Thanks be to God for our liturgies over Holy Week. If we will allow ourselves to be, we are invited to be with Jesus as he enters into Jerusalem and shout "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he who comes in the name of The Lord." We are invited to be with Jesus at the Last Supper and hear those words as if spoken for the first time: "Take, eat, this is my body given for you!" We are invited to have Jesus wash our feet and be reminded that the greatest among us are servants. We are invited to wait with Jesus through the night as he prays. We are invited to sit at the foot of the cross and hear those amazing words "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." And finally, we are invited to the empty tomb on Easter Sunday.

To be truly present in these liturgies; to meditate upon the sacrificial love of God for us; to know that our sins - not only the sins of those in the past, but mine and yours as well - are what nailed Jesus to the Cross where he bore the wrath of God for us...well, to do all that we desperately need God's help. So we pray: "***Mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection...***" And to that I say...AMEN

I pray you all a very blessed Holy Week!

Bishop Menees



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

***Bishop's Note: Collect for Easter Sunday***



***Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by thy life-giving Spirit; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.***

As I write this weeks Bishop's Note, I am smack dab in the middle of the planning and preparations for all of the truly beautiful and intricate liturgies of Holy Week, along with the sermons that accompany them. Additionally, I am smack dab in the middle of several sensitive pastoral situations and the daily cares and concerns of my family. In other words - I'm smack dab in the middle of life! We live in a fallen world - a world that knows pain and suffering; sin and death - and this Holy Week we are reminded very clearly of that reality. However, in our Easter celebrations we are reminded once again that Sin and Death do not have the final word. Jesus had, and has, the final word with his glorious resurrection two thousand years ago.

Allow the words of this weeks collect to wash over you. Note that there is no hesitation, no wavering, no doubt or fear that so often accompany the voice of the world around us. ***"Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life...."*** This is a profound proclamation of our faith that is grounded in the reality of the resurrection! On that first Easter Sunday, Jesus completed what the Law and the Prophets could not do. With the Fall of Adam and Eve came death and sin, and with the resurrection of Jesus Christ came eternal life with God for all who would put their trust in him.

Jesus' resurrection demands a response, and the "Easter Bunny" just won't cut it. Note that the petition in the collect is not: "Allow us to have a beautiful day full of joy and happiness." The appropriate response to the resurrection is a deep desire to live a godly and holy life that overcomes sin and death: ***"Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by thy life-giving Spirit...."***

The "death of sin" is not only the end of our earthly life - the final beats of our heart. It is the death that comes when we compromise and tell ourselves, "My sin is not really

that bad - I'm better than Joe or Mary." With that kind of compromise comes the rationalization that sin is a relative term: "What is sin anyway but just a little mistake." And with that rationalization comes the spiritual death that this prayer speaks against.

Rather than hate the sin in our lives, we tell ourselves to love it - to accept it. Before too long we compromise on other things as well. We don't need to pray daily, or read scripture daily, and when there are more entertaining things to do on Sunday, well, we certainly don't need to go to church. All of this rationalization and compromise leads to a void in our lives, and an ache in our souls, that only the Risen Lord can fill by the power of his life-giving Spirit!

I pray that this Easter Sunday, and every day, you and your family will be filled with that same life-giving Spirit; that same power of the risen Lord; that same joy and awe that comes when we realize that Jesus didn't die and rise again for some unnamed, unknown person out there somewhere, but that he died and rose again for YOU!

I pray you all a Happy and Blessed Easter!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter**



Alleluia. Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

What a joyous proclamation of our faith! So much is captured in this opening acclamation of the Easter Season. Jesus broke the bonds of sin and death, and opened the gates of heaven to all who believe in his name. But this is not *only* a future hope: his sacrifice has made possible true, lasting, and profound reconciliation between man and God, here and now.

This Sunday we are reminded that the Church is God's instrument for that reconciliation:

***Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery hast established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.***

***Amen.***

In this week's Gospel, Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room on that first Easter Day. He breathes on the disciples and says: ***"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."*** (John 20:22b-23)

What an awesome responsibility, and what an awesome joy, Christ has given to his Church. As a priest of the Church, it has been my greatest honor to pronounce absolution upon men and women who come to the Lord with contrite hearts. That forgiveness is available to us because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

At St. James' Easter Vigil this year, a man named Curtice was baptized and confirmed.

Curtice embodies this reconciliation. He gave his testimony about how he'd lost everything, fell into the depths of drink and drugs, and was homeless for years until Dcn. Anna & Dcn. Melinda shared the good news of Christ's reconciling love with him. Curtice received Christ into his life and accepted Jesus' forgiveness. With that grace, Curtice's life was transformed: he has been clean and sober for 265 days, is training to become a cook, and is serving at St. James' Cathedral. Curtice has experienced the Paschal mystery, and for that I give thanks.

God Bless you All!

Bishop Menees

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

*Bishop's Note: Collect for the Third Sunday in Easter*



*O God, whose blessed Son did manifest himself to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open, we pray thee, the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*

*Amen.*

On this third Sunday of Easter, we continue to walk with the disciples as the resurrected Jesus reveals himself to two travelers along the road. Today's gospel is from the 24th chapter of Luke and is the story of the Road to Emmaus, where Jesus revealed himself to Cleopas and the other disciple (I'd like to think Cleopas is going home with his wife, as she's mentioned in John 19:25 as being with Mary at the cross). As they walk along and discuss the events of the past days with Jesus, whom they do not yet recognize, their hearts burn within them. They finally invite Jesus to stay for a simple meal, and it was in the breaking of bread that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus.

As sacramental Christians, we're not surprised that Jesus reveals himself in the breaking of bread, for he reveals himself to us in the breaking of the bread during our celebration of Holy Eucharist.

As a 13 year old boy, my friend invited me to church with him. This was a new experience for me, as I had never been part of a church and certainly didn't have a relationship with God the Father - let alone his only begotten son. Unfortunately, neither he nor another friend showed up that day, and before I could leave the ushers had corralled me and sat me down with them in the back of the church. This was my very first time in church, so everything was new and quite strange. Mostly, I could make sense of what was going on until the celebration of Holy Eucharist. They were talking about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a man who was - so far as I understood then - 2000 years dead. I wanted no part of that, but the ushers were very insistent - to the point of grabbing my elbow and leading me to the altar. (Certainly not something I recommend.) Imagine my relief when the priest came to me and placed a round piece of...cardboard? cracker?...in my hand. Then the chalice bearer came by, and I was equally relieved to look into the chalice and see and smell only wine.

I reluctantly received the bread and the wine, the body and the blood of Jesus, and I have to say that I felt something that I'd never experienced before. It was a warm feeling that spread throughout my body, and it was much more than port wine on an empty stomach. It was like a warm embrace, and I oddly felt the urge to cry, but I held back. To my surprise, the priest (Fr. Bob) noticed me and came back and knelt in front of me. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Welcome Home."

Like Cleopas and "the other disciple," I had my eyes opened to the presence of Jesus in my life in the breaking of the bread. The following week I gave my life to Christ on a youth group trip to Tijuana, Mexico. I was baptized a couple of months later, and was confirmed a few months after that. Because a friend invited me to church to sit with Jesus and to break bread, my life was change and transformed by the love of Christ.

This Sunday, who can you invite to join you at the table of The Lord?

Alleluia Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Easter***

***O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of thy people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he doth lead; who, with thee and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever.***

***Amen.***



This Sunday is known as Good Shepherd Sunday for good reason: we are reminded that our risen Lord is indeed the ***"Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep."*** (John 10:11)

Thanks be to God that we do have a Good Shepherd, because the world has known so many bad shepherds: Shepherds who do not lead sacrificially. Shepherds who keep the sheep in the sheep pen rather than leading them out into green pastures where they may be safe and at peace to lie down..

This Sunday I will have the honor of ordaining Steve Veselsky to the transitional diaconate. At that time, I will challenge him to pattern his life after the Good Shepherd, who never thinks of himself but of his sheep; who never leads from the back but always from the front - willing to face the dangers ahead; and who always protects the sheep before himself.

The collect this week, however, is not asking that our pastors will be good shepherds, but that all of us - clergy and laymen alike - will listen to the Good Shepherd, who is the Son of God. The question for most of us is: how do we know the difference between our own voice and that of the Good Shepherd?

We know that it's the Good Shepherd's voice when we can easily see that it is backed up by the Word of God. We know it's our own voice when we have to rationalize that "it could be" God's desire.

We know it's the Good Shepherd's voice when he asks us to reach out beyond ourselves for the sake others. We know it's our voice when it leads to comfort and a shorter path, and we have to rationalize that God wants us to be comfortable.

We know it's the Good Shepherd's voice when he points us toward the our Heavenly Father rather than an earthly pleasure. We know it's our own voice when we tell ourselves that we deserve some earthly pleasures - rationalizing that, after all, God created everything!

This Sunday we pray that we will be granted ears to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd as well as the Grace to step out in faith to follow him - not knowing exactly where we will be going, but knowing in the depth of our being that we want to go anywhere the Good Shepherd is leading!

A blessed Good Shepherd Sunday to you all, and a blessed Mother's Day to all the moms and moms-to-be in the Diocese of San Joaquin!

Bishop Menees



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter***



**Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.**

***Amen.***

If last Sunday was known as Good Shepherd Sunday, perhaps this Sunday should be known as The Unique Way Sunday. This Sunday's collect captures the fact that Jesus is the unique and ONLY way to God the Father and eternal life with Him. This is the good news of Jesus Christ - that we have a way to the Father. All other religions require their practitioners to work hard and lift themselves up to God. Christianity proclaims that, ***"...God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that all who believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*** (John 3:16) It is not that we have to do anything to receive Christ's love, but rather that we must simply accept it; simply say yes; simply believe in Him who believed in you before you ever believed in Him.

That being the case, what a tragedy it is when we hold back the *full truth* of the gospel. I'll never forget watching the very moving funeral service of President Gerald Ford on TV on January 3, 2007. The service in the National Cathedral was a state event, with all the appropriate pomp and circumstance befitting the funeral services for the 38th President of the United States. The liturgy was flawless, and the music was majestic. How sad, therefore, when Fr. Robert Certain climbed into the towering pulpit to preach the funeral sermon but left off the final phrase of John 14:6 - ***"I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME."*** With literally millions of people watching the service live on TV, Fr. Certain had the opportunity to offer the hope of Christ to a lost and hurting world, but fell short.

When asked about it later, he stated that he wanted to focus on President Ford as the healer of the nation; that to speak of Christ as the unique way to salvation would be divisive. However, I would argue that President Ford could only have been a healer because he followed the great healer - Jesus Christ!

Fr. Certain expressed a fear that far too many Christians in the West have come to believe as true - that the uniqueness of Jesus as the only way to the Father is, "exclusive and intolerant." The opposite is true. Because Jesus died for all who would put their faith and trust in him, it is not dependent upon the person's individual ethnicity, culture, language, education, economic status, etc., etc. When we say, "Well, people in the East are Hindu and Buddhist, people in the Middle East are Muslim," etc., we are truly being exclusivist - saying that we are going to keep the truth of the gospel to ourselves in the wealthy, educated West.

What this collect proclaims is that Jesus is **The Way, The Truth, and The Life**. Equally the petition to God is that we will so embody that Truth and follow in that Way, that not only will we have the fruit of that relationship - eternal life with Jesus - but that we will share that Truth with all who will listen.

I pray you all a blessed week!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

***Bishop's Note: Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter***



***O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards thee, that we, loving thee in all things and above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.***

***Amen.***

This week's Collect seems to draw its inspiration from the First Epistle of St. John, chapter four: ***"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*** (1 John 4:7-8) Because God is love, He is by His very nature loving, and desires to pour into the hearts of His children things that are so wonderful we cannot begin to imagine them!

When we are "born from God," i.e. born again, we have our hearts and souls supernaturally prepared to receive the love of God and to share it with others. Hard to imagine isn't it? Thus, any love we receive or give does not originate within us or others, but is a gift from God and is meant to be returned to Him and shared with others.

What this collect calls us to do is love the Lord our God above everything and everyone else in our lives! He is to be our first priority and our principle aim. I like the way that the Westminster Catechism states it:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

When we have our priorities correct - in other words when God is at the top of our list -

what we discover is that everything else falls into proper perspective. Most of the difficulties in our daily lives come when we and others place ourselves, our families, our work, etc. first and God second, or third, or fourth.

This Collect reminds us that when we love God above all things, then we receive the blessings that exceed our greatest desires. How awesome is that?!

Now let me ask: Do you expect your Father in Heaven to bless you? Do you look for those blessings in your life? If I'm honest, I do look for God's blessings, but I need to do so even more. Like the father of the ill son in the gospel of Mark, who cried out to Jesus: ***"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief,"*** (Mark 9:24) my faith is imperfect but fulfilling; imperfect but compelling; imperfect but loving. And, even my *imperfect* faith is a gift from God. I am exceedingly grateful for the gift of God's love in my life, which I am privileged to share with you all.

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: Collect for the Feast of the Ascension

*"Almighty God, whose blessed Son our Savior Jesus Christ ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things: Mercifully give us faith to perceive that, according to his promise, he abides with his Church on earth, even to the end of the ages; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.*

*Amen"*



Today, May 29th, is the fortieth day after Easter and, throughout the church catholic, this day is known as the **Feast of the Ascension** - one of the major Holy Days of the church, which include: Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Many of our parishes will celebrate the reality of the Ascension of our Lord to the right hand of God today, and others will transfer the celebration of this feast to Sunday. In either case, there is no getting around the importance of this event in the life of the Apostles, the life of the Church, and our very own lives.

*"And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11)*

With these words, the Resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father - answering his own question to the disciples in the Gospel of John: *"Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"* (John 6:62)

We proclaim our faith in this reality every Sunday in the Nicene Creed. We state it because it is an important aspect of our faith. We believe that Jesus sits enthroned in power at the right hand of the Father, welcoming the saints into heaven and waiting until the fulfillment of time, when he will return to judge the earth. However, in the meantime,

our Lord intercedes on our behalf. What an amazing reality, that The Lord of the universe - the savior of mankind, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords - is the same one who sits at his Father's side, pleading on our behalf.

Thus, when my daughter was born ill and I offered up desperate prayers in the name of Jesus it was, in fact, Jesus who leaned over to his Father and begged His intervention to supernaturally change the course of natural law and miraculously heal her...which He did!

Jesus, while seated at the right hand of the Father, is also very present with us in Word and Sacrament. He fills his church with his presence and grace.

Lastly, it is with Jesus' ascension into heaven that his promise to, "not leave us orphaned," (John 14:18) was fulfilled, when God sent us the Holy Spirit: ***"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."*** (John 14:25-28)

The Ascension means that, even though things may seem difficult for us in a fallen world, the King is on his throne, and he has sent us the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, Guide, Comforter and Provider. We need not let our hearts be troubled, but simply trust in the King!

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

*Bishop's Note: Collect for Pentecost Sunday*



*O God, who on this day didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people by sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.*

Last week we celebrated the feast of the Ascension - the reality of Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven to reign in Glory at the right hand of the Father and to intercede on our behalf, until His coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead! Jesus had told the disciples that he must leave - that the Holy Spirit could not come until he had ascended into heaven: ***"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."*** (John 16:7 ESV) When he did ascend into heaven, the believers were again - just as they were between Good Friday and Easter Sunday - left feeling alone, disoriented, confused, and grieving. However, Jesus had promised them that he would not leave them orphaned - (John 14:15) that he would send the Holy Spirit.

This Sunday we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, which commemorates the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit, and, with that arrival, the Birth of the Church.

Often when we think of the Holy Spirit, we think of the gifts that He brings to us when we allow Him into lives. These gifts are outlined in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, among other places. However, when Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit, he wanted to provide comfort for our lost souls, our griefs, and our sorrows, and to illumine our hearts and minds to the will of God in both the macro and micro senses. When we read the Word of God, the Holy Spirit opens us up to understand God's will for all people. Reading the books of the bible that deal with history shows us how God *has acted* in the past. The books of the prophets and Revelation show how God *will act* in history. The Gospels, Epistles, and Acts of the Apostles often direct us how *to act* as individuals in a specific historical context, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit in His Word, he also speaks to us by direct communication - through reason & tradition - through inspiration and dreams - through clergy and friends. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is constant in opening our hearts and minds to the knowledge and love of God.

The question isn't: "Is the Holy Spirit illuminating the Truth?" The question is: "Are we open to the Truth that the Holy Spirit illuminates?" For me, that is one aspect of this prayer, this collect, that speaks to me: ***"Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;"*** that God, through the Holy Spirit, would grant us right judgement in all things; the ability to

discern wisdom from folly - demons from angels - truth from falsehood. The world around us is constantly trying to mislead and misdirect us, but the Holy Spirit brings us back home to the heart of the matter, which begins and ends with God: His Love, His Grace, and His Will in our lives.

The second aspect of this collect that speaks to me is its charge that we rest in the Comfort of the Holy Spirit: ***“Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort....”*** The ability to rest in the Holy Spirit - to rejoice in His Holy Comfort - is so important, and so often ignored. God does not desire anxiety but peace, not worry but faith, not discord but unity. Those things all come through our rejoicing in His Holy Comfort! So, if you are experiencing anxiety, worry, and discord, I would especially appeal to you this Sunday to open your heart and mind to God the Holy Spirit to receive the Grace that He desires to give you but will never force upon you!

My prayer for you and me this Sunday as we celebrate the Coming of the Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church, is that we will be open to the teaching and direction that God the Holy Spirit desires to give us.

May God bless and keep you all!

Bishop Menees



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for Trinity Sunday**



*Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of thy Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech thee that thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see thee in thy one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Last Sunday - Pentecost Sunday - we celebrated the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that God the Father would send the Holy Spirit, who would help God's people and lead them into all Truth. With the arrival of the Holy Spirit, who will be with us "forever" (John 14:16), God revealed himself in the third person of the Trinity. In a very real way this revelation of God began in creation, was embodied in the incarnation, and was fulfilled forever in the Holy Spirit.

Today's collect reflects the wonderful mystery and reality of our Triune God - One God in Three Persons - that Jesus himself refers to in his command to the disciples to, ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** (Matthew 28:19)

Over and over again in the scriptures we see the doctrine of the Holy Trinity reflected. From Genesis through Revelation, God is consistently revealing himself as One God in Three Persons involved in a cosmic dance - a relationship that demonstrates divine love and harmony.

However, because this doctrine can only be understood partially by the human mind, false doctrines and heresies have arisen through the ages that mark sharp differences between denominations like the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons that deny the Trinity and thus separate themselves, I believe, from traditional orthodox Christianity.

In the fourth century, St. Athanasius confronted these false teachings, and I encourage you to take the time, especially this week, reading through and praying the Athanasian Creed (79 BCP pg. 864). In his *Letters to Serapion*, he wrote the following about the Holy Trinity which I think speaks clearly: ***"[The Trinity] is a Trinity not merely in name or in a figurative manner of speaking; rather, it is a Trinity in truth and in actual existence. Just as the Father is he that is, so also his Word is one that is and is God over all. And neither is the Holy Spirit nonexistent but actually exists and has true being. Less than these the Catholic Church does not hold, lest she sink to the level of the Jews of the present time, imitators of Caiaphas, or to the level of Sabellius" (Letters to Serapion 1:28 [A.D. 359]).*** Athanasius' reference to Sabellius was to the heresy of "Modalism." Sabellius was a priest who argued that there is One Person to the Godhead who acts in three ways. This denies all of the scriptures like, ***"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."*** (John 14:9)

Ultimately though, because our minds are human, a complete understanding of the Holy Trinity remains a mystery to us. This Sunday we'll read about the Trinity in Holy Scripture, and you will hear eloquent sermons on the doctrine of the Trinity. However, when push comes to shove, it boils down to a choice to believe - a choice supported by scripture and the tradition of the Church Fathers. This belief, this practice of faith, comes in itself as a gift from God, and today's Collect asks God for that assistance. ***"Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of thy Divine Majesty to worship the Unity...."*** It takes God's Grace for us to make a confession of true faith and, in doing so, our faith grows more and more, as does our experience of Grace. And to that I say...Amen!

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 7**

*O Lord, we beseech thee, make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name, for thou never failest to help and govern those whom thou hast set upon the sure foundation of thy loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



This week we begin "ordinary" time - having entered the Season of Pentecost and celebrated Trinity Sunday. The Season of Pentecost spans about half of the year, and during this time we focus on the life and teaching of Jesus as they are lived out in the Church. As such, most of the collects will focus on how we should be living our lives as individual Christians within the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

This week's collect begins in a unique way, asking God to grant us **"...perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name...."** What does it mean to have both fear and love? Those seem to be competing ideas - do we really want to fear and love God? The answer for me is YES!

King David thought it fitting to fear the Lord when he wrote: ***"...the fear of the Lord is clean,***

***enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether,"*** (Psalm 19:9) and King Solomon wrote: ***"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction."*** (Proverbs 1:7)

Seems to me that anyone who does not fear the Lord does not believe in God. To fear the Lord is to recognize who we are in relation to who God is. I grew up in Southern California. Each year as storms brewed out in the Pacific Ocean they would spawn large waves, sometimes growing to 20 feet or higher. When these waves would rise up on the sand bar approaching the shore, they would crest with huge curls and, when they crashed down, they would send water spray up two to three times the height of the original waves. In high school I would, from time to time, play hooky and go to the beach to see these waves, and sometimes I was foolish enough to go body surfing or boogie boarding. Just seeing these waves would raise a deep fear within me - fear of the awesome power that

they contained and the destruction that could be wrought by that power. To fear these waves is the appropriate response toward them. Fear was not the only thing that would capture me - I was captured by their beauty and depth, their colors, and their uniqueness as each wave was different. I especially marveled at the porpoises that would, illuminated from the back by the sun, surf the translucent waves.

I fear The Lord because I know, or at least have some idea, who he is and - especially - who I am not. I fear The Lord and his awesome power, who not only created the waves but ALL things in heaven and on earth. I fear The Lord because I know that sometime in the next 60 seconds to 60 years I will meet him face to face, who is both my redeemer and my judge.

The fear I have for The Lord is balanced by the love I have for him, and so I find myself living in a beautiful dance of Grace and Fear, Faith and Hope - all grounded in the knowledge that God is always faithful, always loving, and always overflowing in love. And to that I say...AMEN

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 3rd Week of Pentecost - Proper 8**



*O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

This week I am deeply honored to be with my brother bishops of the Anglican Church in North America at the Monastery of St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. The College of Bishops met for two and half days of prayer and conversation seeking to discern God's will for us as a church and to determine whom He would have as our next Archbishop. We are a diverse group of 51 members, with both active and retired bishops present. We come from the four corners of the Anglican Communion and the four corners of North America. We speak different languages and have different skin colors. How precious it is, then, that we are so united in our faith and our goals. This is not to say that we do not have differences of thought and opinion that are very important. However, we are united as a body because we share the same foundation as a church - the teaching of Jesus Christ, his apostles, and the prophets.

Because we share a common understanding of, and submission to, who Jesus Christ is - namely, the Only Begotten Son of God who, *"...was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. On the third day he rose again, He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead....,"* - we are united as a Church and Province.

This year with the rolling out of the new catechism, *To Be A Christian*, we have demonstrated our belief and understanding that it is not enough to be united under a common liturgy or worship practice on Sunday Morning. We are not united on a common experience alone, but a common understanding of what that experience means in our lives.

I pray that this collect will resonate with each member of the Diocese of San Joaquin. I

pray that we will seek God's grace and strength to open ourselves up to studying the doctrines of Holy Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church. I pray that each member of the diocese will seriously undertake a study of the catechism alone and with friends and then, most importantly, teach it to others.

It is when we are actively making disciples that we are most authentically the church and are fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ: **"Go into all the world making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...."**

(Matthew 28:19-20a)

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Pentecost - Proper 9**

*O God, who hast taught us to keep all thy commandments by loving thee and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to thee with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*



Last week I had the great honor of participating in the election of the second Archbishop of the Anglican Church in North America - The Most Rev. Foley Beach. The bishops met in conclave for our first election of an archbishop following the model of the Roman Catholic Church. In this process the bishops committed to entering into a time of prayer and fasting, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Archbishop Duncan, our first archbishop, opened with one of his favorite sayings: "Let's keep the main thing the main thing," quoting Stephen Covey.

In a very real way this week's collect is also reminding us to, "keep the main thing the main thing." The collect reflects the fact that God has, through His Word, taught us to keep all of His Commandments. What comes to mind when you think of God's Commandments? The 10 Commandments are a likely answer. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) - not Ten Suggestions, as is often said. Let's be honest - how tough is it to follow the 10 Commandments? Well, about half are super easy to follow because they are negative commandments - Thou shalt not: Steal, Murder, Commit Adultery, Bear False Witness, take the Lord's Name in Vain. The other half are tougher - Worship God and Him Alone, Keep the Sabbath, Have No Idols, Honor Father and Mother, Do Not Covet.

Jesus summed up all the commandments by reminding us to, "keep the main thing the main thing." When asked what the greatest commandment was, he said that we are to: ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39)***

Let me ask: How's that going for you, fulfilling the greatest commandment? If I'm honest,

fulfilling the greatest commandment is my highest aspiration but, admittedly, impossible without the assistance of God the Holy Spirit, whose power and grace constitute our only hope in being able to keep God's commandments. Simply by seeking to love God and neighbor by His own power and grace, we offer the greatest witness to the world around us. Jesus again told the disciples, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13: 34-35)

Simply said, LOVE is the main thing. We can and will fulfill the commandments of God if we will but love Him and love one another! I pray that this week you will both give and receive that same love from our one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God bless you all!

Bishop Menees

PS. This week I am starting a new practice - placing one of the questions and answers from the ACA Catechism along with my Bishop's Note. I pray that you will read it, memorize it and share it with others.

## ***Catechism***

### **1. What is the Gospel?**

The Gospel is the good news of God loving and saving lost mankind through the ministry in word and deed of his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Romans 5:15; John 1:12; 1 John 5:11-12)



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Pentecost - Proper 10**



***"O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."***

In Part A of this week's collect, we ask the Lord: **"...mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people...."** Did you know that God hears and answers every prayer? The range of answers is generally the same. YES. NO. And NOT YET. Of course, when the answer is YES we are thrilled. When the answer is NO or NOT YET, we are less than happy. However, the Lord's answer to our prayers is ALWAYS the correct answer. Our responsibility is to ask the Lord, receive the answer and then to obey the answer of the Lord.

Part B of this week's plea to the Lord is: **"...who call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do...."** The answer to this request will most assuredly be YES. If we ask the Lord to show us how we should be following Him; how we should be serving Him; how we should be loving others; the answer will be YES. The question will be: are we open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit? The ways He answers are numerous. For me, I often go to sleep asking the Lord for guidance, and I wake up in the morning just knowing what it is I'm supposed to do. This is most especially true with my preaching: "Lord what would you have me say this Sunday," is often my prayer on Thursday night going to bed - I generally write my sermon on Friday. Now, this prayer also comes after having read the scriptures on Monday and having begun my study of the word - so things are already percolating in my spirit - but it is the Lord's prompting that directs my preaching.

If we are seeking to do God's will in our lives, then we'll be reading His Word, speaking with godly brothers and sisters, examining our dreams, and quietly listening to The Lord. The problem is that, too often, we come to Him out of stress and anxiety because we find out backs against the wall. But I promise you, if you pray for His guidance, God will offer it.

Part C is the most important part of the prayer, in my opinion: **"...and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same...."** This is the part of the prayer that we often leave out. We ask God for guidance, but then fail to ask Him for the grace and power to fulfill what He guides us to do.

I pray that this week's collect will open you up to the prompting of the Spirit along with the power and grace to fulfill God's desires for your life.

I pray you all a blessed week!

Bishop Menees

## **Catechetical Question #2**

2. What is the human condition?

The universal human condition is that, though made for fellowship with our Creator, we have been cut off from him by self-centered rebellion against him, leading to guilt, shame, and fear of death and judgment. This is the state of sin.

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: Collect for the Sixth Sunday in Pentecost - Proper 11



***"Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion, we beseech thee, upon our infirmities, and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, mercifully give us for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."***

Last week I said that God hears and answers every prayer that we offer to Him. This week's collect first acknowledges God's omniscience, as He is the fountain of all wisdom, and that he knows what we need long before we even ask. One might be tempted with this acknowledgement to be a fatalist, to simply say: "God is in charge, why would I bother Him with my petty prayers and concerns?" The answer to that is simple: God wants us to communicate with Him, to acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and to declare our trust in Him. Look at the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: "***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen***" (Luke 11:2-4) Certainly Jesus is aware that God knows everything that there ever was or is to know, and yet Jesus teaches us to Praise God, acknowledge His sovereignty, ask for the needs of the community and our personal needs, and seek His guidance.

This week's collect also acknowledges God's sovereignty and begs His compassion and mercy upon our infirmity; our blindness; our ignorance; not because we merit His compassion, but because of Jesus' merit and love. And to that I say, AMEN.

God bless you all.

Bishop Menees

*Catechetical Question #3*

**3. How does sin affect you?**

Sin alienates me from God, my neighbor, God's good creation, and myself. I am hopeless, guilty, lost, helpless, and walking in the way of death.

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

Bishop's Note: Collect for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 12



O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

This week's collect is one of those truly beautiful prayers that Archbishop Cranmer included in the Book of Common Prayer but probably dates back to perhaps as far as Pope Gregory and the seventh century and the Gregorian Sacramentary. This prayer speaks to the heart and the mind and, I might add, raises some eyebrows.

I love the opening line which acknowledges the sovereignty and majesty of God who is the source of all strength and holiness. The collect petitions God to have mercy upon us during this transitory and often difficult life.

I've never understood those preachers who preach a "prosperity gospel" - which says "believe in Jesus and all will be well - you'll be wealthy and healthy all will be good." I've never understood how they could preach that gospel and read Matthew 16:24 ***"Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."***

At the other end of the spectrum we live in a fallen and broken world that knows so much pain and sorrow - turn on the news or check out your computer newsfeed and see how Hamas militants are launching mortars into Israel killing innocent men, women and children then act completely surprised when Israel responds by bombing the back yard where the mortars were launched which also has "collateral damage" meaning that innocent men, women and children are killed.

This prayer asks God to have mercy on us in the midst of this "temporal" life that we may not fall into despair or cynicism or give into the Lie of Satan inviting us to worship the "creation rather than the creator" (Romans 1:25) - which is the very definition of

paganism.

What raises the eyebrow is the conclusion of that petition - "Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal;" raises the fear in us that salvation may be lost.

Our salvation was established for us in Christ's sacrifice on the cross and our response to his love through our faith in Him. St. Paul said it so succinctly in his letter to the Ephesians - ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"*** (Ephesians 2:8) But what happens if we abandon our faith in Christ and place our faith in ourselves or false gods? What happens if we reject the gift of God? What happens is hell, literally. I suspect that little could break God's preverbal heart more than to have his adopted son or daughter reject him for themselves. Because God is gracious He allows us to love Him and receive His love and He allows us to reject Him and disavow His love. That rejection can have eternal consequences IF that rejection is not repented of. Again God is gracious and we have until our last breath.

That is why we need God's Mercy and Grace that we may keep our eyes on Him always aware of His Grace and Love...and to that I say AMEN!

I pray you all a very blessed week!

Bishop Menees

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 13**



***"O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succor, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***

As a bishop of the Church, this week's collecting prayer is one that is ever present on my lips. "Please God, have pity on your church and on me as your servant." Funny, when we think of the act of "pity," vague, negative connotations come to mind of the strong offering the weak sympathy out of guilt, or to get the weak to leave them alone - an image of shivering Oliver Twist asking for another morsel of bread from the indifferent, wealthy, top hatted man on the street corner. However, the term actually speaks more about someone in a position of power and authority having genuine compassion on a weaker person and providing them help and protection.

That is exactly the situation that we are in, and we need to be in continual acknowledgment of the reality that God is God, and we are His creation. In some ways, we are like the blind men on the side of the road near Jericho. They called out for Jesus to have mercy upon them and Jesus responded in pity and healed them:

***"And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' And stopping, Jesus called them and said, 'What do you want me to do for you?' They said to him, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened.' And Jesus in pity touched their eyes and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him"*** (Matthew 21:30-34)

The blind men were blessed because they, unlike the Jewish authorities known as the Pharisees, recognized their blindness. This week's collect calls upon the Lord to have pity upon His church - to cleanse and defend us. What an important prayer, because too often

we don't recognize our uncleanness or defenselessness until it is too late - until Satan has attacked, we've compromised our standards, and the flood gates have been opened.

Generally, this has taken place in the Church when she has sought to be "relevant" to the world - which has meant accepting the practices of the world for fear of the world rejecting us. History has proven how very deadly this desire to be liked by the world can be to the Church. The very existence of the Anglican Diocese of San Joaquin is due to the desire of the Episcopal Church USA to be relevant. In a short period of time, the leaders opened the floodgates by no longer seeking to live up to the standards of Holy Scripture. As a result, questions regarding the divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the physical resurrection, biblical ethics, etc., etc. are compromised so as not to "offend" anyone. The ethic of "tolerance" has become their guiding principle. The problem is that "tolerance" implies that you have a firm standard that you live by, and that you are gracious to an opposing view while not abandoning the standard or accepting the other viewpoint. The Episcopal Church, and many other mainline denominations, have confused "tolerance" with capitulation to, and acceptance of, a non-biblical world view. Thus, they accept almost anything as good and right, as long as people do not impose their views upon another person or group.

Let us join with Archbishop Cranmer and pray that the Lord will have pity on His Church, cleanse us of our errors and desire to be merely liked, and defend us from future attack and error.

I pray you all a very blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees



**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Ninth Week after Pentecost - Proper 14**

***"Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot exist without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***



Have you ever noticed how Archbishop Cranmer, in the Collects - either the ones he wrote or the ones he included from previous works - tends to confront our number one sin: Pride? This week's collect does not disappoint in addressing the issues of human pride and vanity.

Our pride tells us: "I know the difference between right and wrong, I don't need to pray for God to direct me to think rightly." Boy is that line of thinking messed up! Note that the prayer calls upon the Lord to give us His Spirit in order, always, to think and do the right thing. "Always think the right thing and do the right thing;" now there is the rub. I can often think of the right thing to do, but my ability to think it and the willpower to do it are not always in sync. In fact, more often than I'd like to admit, I think of the right thing to do but I do the wrong thing. I suspect that you may be able to relate with this. St. Paul certainly understood this reality when he wrote his letter to the Church in Rome: ***"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."*** (Romans 7:15)

How often do you know the right thing to do, but do the wrong thing? Or - put even more strongly - do the very thing you hate? The answer for the vast majority of us is: "More often than I'd like to admit." When we rely upon our own strength and willpower, too often we give into temptation, or expediency, or peer pressure.

Which is the very reason for this week's Collect. Archbishop Cranmer is reminding us in this prayer that we need not rely upon our power and strength but upon the power and strength of The Lord and Him alone. It is by God's Grace alone that we do the right thing or even think the right thing. What a huge blessing that is - we do not need to rely upon our own strength, but upon the strength of the Lord God and Him alone!

All too often we act like we are alone. We believe we have to carry the burden - we have to pull ourselves up by our own boot straps. Whenever we tell ourselves that or live that way, Satan rejoices because it means that we have bought into his lie that we are self-sufficient. Jesus tells us just the opposite: ***“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*** (Matthew 12:29-30) I suspect it breaks Jesus' heart when we fail to respond to his gracious offer to, "Take my yoke upon you...." The image of the yoke was very common in the first century, but in an age of tractors and farm machinery we lose some of the impact.

A yoke is that wooden implement that - very often - fastens two oxen together so that the farmer can harness the power of not just one, but two oxen to plow a field, remove a tree stump, or do whatever heavy labor a man could not do on his own. There is a tradition that Jesus, as a carpenter, specialized in making yokes, since each yoke had to be specially made for each set of oxen so that the wood would not chaff their hides, and to best maximize their combined power.

That image is a beautiful one: Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders so that we do not have to bear life's burdens on our own. That is God's grace and love for you and me: the desire not simply to sit up in His heaven, detached and far away, but rather hooked together to pull along His adopted son or daughter, or - more often than not - to carry him or her.

Let us join together in this week's Collect, bidding God to grant us the Grace not only to think the right thing but to do it - not on our own, but joined together with God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And to that I say...AMEN.

I pray you all a very blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

### Catechism Questions

#### **4. What is the way of death?**

The way of death is a life empty of God's love and life-giving Holy Spirit, controlled by things that cannot bring me eternal joy, but that lead only into darkness, misery and eternal condemnation.

**5. Can you mend your broken relationship with God?**

No. I have no power to save myself, for sin has corrupted my conscience and captured my will. Only God can save me.

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: Collect for the Tenth Sunday of Pentecost - Proper 15



*"Almighty God, who hast given thy only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin and also an example of godly life: Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavor ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."*

As a student in my second year of college, I remember taking a study break and sitting on the bench in front of the Library on a beautiful spring day. A pretty young woman came over and sat down next to me, which caught my attention. She said hello and struck up a conversation. In a few minutes I knew her name, she knew mine, and I wondered hopefully whether, for the first time in my life, a pretty young woman was hitting on me - that is, until she asked the question: "Are you saved?" In this context I had no clue what she was talking about, and I quickly deduced that my chances for a date would vanish quickly if I didn't answer the question correctly. So, I finally responded, "Saved from what?" Oh my, her eyes lit up and she went into a thirty minute exhortation on the merits of giving my life to Jesus Christ and being saved from the fires of hell. When I could finally get a word in, and hoping that the possibility for a date might be back on the table I said, "Why yes, I'm baptized and confirmed, and I want to be an Episcopal Priest."

Apparently that was the wrong thing to say if I wanted a date, because the conversation ended with her saying, "Wonderful...OK God bless you." With that, the young woman stood up and went over to another bench where another young man sat alone. She sat next to him and I could see his eyes light up as I thought, "Poor guy."

Since then I've wrestled with that question - Saved from what? The fires of hell? Yes, and more. Theologically what this refers to is "substitutionary atonement;" that is, the doctrine that states that Jesus gave his life on the cross as a substitute for you and me, so that He would receive the wrath of God instead of us. For our sins, we deserve God's wrath because God is a just God and justice requires punishment. Jesus bore the punishment of God for our sins in our place. Isaiah prophesied about this 700 years before Jesus was born: ***"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."*** (Isaiah 53:5) And St. Peter wrote about it in his first letter: ***"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."*** (1 Peter 2:24) It is important to note that the purpose of Jesus' suffering was more than simply saving us from the fires of hell. He suffered and died so that we might be healed and live lives that glorify God and honor Jesus' sacrifice.

The question that lies before us is: How do we respond to the love of Jesus, who received the just punishment due to you and me? This week's Collect contains the answer to that question. First, we ask God to give us an attitude of gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice - that we not ignore it or cheapen it or minimize it. If it were not for Jesus' sacrifice and our acceptance of that grace, we would receive the punishment of God: eternal separation from Him - which is the very definition of hell. Second, we look to example of Jesus' life, as set forth in scripture, for the very model of how we are to live our lives as the adopted children of God.

If we can, with God's help, develop grateful hearts and seek to live lives that reflect Jesus' life and love, we will both honor God and have wonderfully fulfilled lives. And to that I say, AMEN!

God Bless You All!

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions Six & Seven*

#### **6. What is the way of life?**

The way of life is a life directed toward loving and responding to God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of God's indwelling Holy Spirit.

#### **7. What does God want to give you?**

God wants to reconcile me to himself, to free me from captivity to sin, to fill me with knowledge of him, to make me a citizen of his kingdom, and to enable me to worship, serve, and glorify him now and forever.

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 11th Sunday of Pentecost - Proper 16**



***"Grant, we beseech thee, merciful God, that thy Church, being gathered together in unity by thy Holy Spirit, may manifest thy power among all peoples, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen"***

This week's Collect speaks to both the greatest power and the greatest weakness of the Church - our unity and our disunity.

On the Lord's Day, we gather to give thanks to God for His Grace and Mercy in the liturgy known as The Lord's Supper; or Holy Communion; or Holy Eucharist. In this service, we pray prayers that have been prayed for two thousand years, and that are said by millions of Christians on the same day around the world. How awesome is that? To know that brothers and sisters in Kenya, and Argentina, and the Arctic Circle are all confessing our faith in the words of the Nicene or Apostles' Creeds - saying the same words that Jesus used as we consecrate the bread and wine, which mystically become the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Just one step back from that, we share the same faith with millions of other Christians who are not as liturgically centered in the Holy Eucharist, but share the same love of Christ and His Word as found in the Bible. In that shared faith, there is such strength and grace.

However, I also believe that in that same unity of faith, there is a disunity of polity. Following the great divide of the Church - East and West in the eleventh century - and then the Reformation of the sixteenth century - dividing Protestant from Roman Catholic - the Lord's heart is broken. It is impossible to imagine the impact that the Church could have in this broken world, if only we worked in concert rather than - too frequently - working at odds with each other.

Let us join with Jesus and pray for unity in faith and life: ***"Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."*** (John 17:11) And to that I say...AMEN!

I pray you all a very blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions 8 & 9*

#### **8. How does God save you?**

God saves me by grace, which is his undeserved love given to me in and through Jesus. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

#### **9. Who is Jesus Christ?**

Jesus is my Savior, fully divine and fully human. He bore my sins, dying in my place on the cross, then rose from the dead to rule as anointed king over me and all creation.

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: Collect for 12th week of Pentecost - Proper 17

*"Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."*



This week's Collect is a powerful one, representing both our Hebraic and Reformed roots. The opening declaration recognizes the power and authority of God: "Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things:..." Can't you hear the ring of the rabbinic prayers? One such traditional prayer, upon awaking in the morning, goes something like this: "Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the Universe. I give you thanks, for you have restored my soul with kindness and mercy." So, too, this collect acknowledges God's majesty, power, and grace. Only He is able to answer our petitions.

**"Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name;..."** Only God can graft anything to the hardened human heart. A love for the name of Jesus is a love that leads us to our knees in worship and lifts our hands in praise. As St. Paul penned: *"Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11 ESV)

**"...increase in us true religion;..."** This petition, for me, asks of God to cast away from us all "religiosity" which, in my mind, is when the acts of worship are meant to show God our worth. True religion is without pretense, because it's based on the knowledge that we are loved beyond measure - not because we deserve it, but because of God's perfect character.

**"...nourish us with all goodness;..."** Only God can nourish us with all goodness because He is the source and content of all goodness. Here, goodness is synonymous with God Himself. This is clearly seen in Moses' petition to God and the Lord's response: *"Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.'"* (Exodus 33:18-19 ESV)



**"...and bring forth in us the fruit of good works;..."** It stands to reason that if God answers the first three petitions, then the fruit will be good works. This is work that comes in response to God's love and grace, NOT as a means to earn God's love and grace. Jesus said it perfectly: ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*** (John 15:5 ESV)

My prayer for all of us this week is that God will grant the petitions of this Collect so that we, as individuals and as the Church, may abide in Christ and in Him alone!

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions 10-11*

#### **10. Is there any other way of salvation?**

No. The Apostle Peter said of Jesus, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

#### **11. How should you respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

I should repent of my sins and put faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and my Lord.

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 13th Week of Pentecost - Proper 18**



***"Grant us, O Lord, we pray thee, to trust in you with all our heart; for, as thou dost alway resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so thou dost not forsake those who make their boast of thy mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."***

This week's Collect is one of those that captures both the heart and mind of the petitioner. We call out to God to grant us the ability to trust in Him with all our heart, just like the father who brings his demon possessed son to Jesus asking for His help. Jesus responds: ***"All things are possible for one who believes."*** ***Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*** (Mark 9 23b-24) Our trust, like our belief, is not perfect, but with God's help it is made perfect in Him!

Trusting in God means that we are not trusting in ourselves. This is the key - we need to stop trusting in ourselves - our own strengths and talents. Even believing that we have strengths and talents apart from God is a false belief - a potential idol - and the very thing that leads to pride. If we give ourselves completely to the Lord, we will come to understand that everything we have and everything we are is, in fact, a gift from God.

And we can make this petition to the Lord because we can trust in the His grace and mercy! It is Jesus whose mercy and grace led Him to offer His life as a ransom for ours! It causes me to think of St. Paul's "Sermon on the Mount" from the 12th chapter of Romans: ***"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*** (Romans 12:1) My prayer for all of us in the Diocese of San Joaquin is that we may truly place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and Him alone. I've already begun with this prayer and will continue to offer it as I, and all of us, deal with the frustrations and trials of life in a fallen world!

I pray you all a blessed week!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 12 & 13

**12. What does it mean for you to repent?**

To repent means that I have a change of heart, turning from serving myself to serving God. I need God's help to make this change.

**13. What does it mean for you to have faith?**

To have faith means that I believe the gospel is true; I acknowledge that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead to rule over me; I entrust myself to him as my Savior; and I obey him as my Lord. As the Apostle Paul said, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Feast of the Holy Cross - September 14th**



***"Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world unto himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen."***

Crosses are an interesting thing. This past weekend I was with the leadership at St. Francis, Stockton, and learned of a beautiful cross given to them by parishioners. It is a "Franciscan Cross" (the Cross of San Damiano, from which Jesus spoke to St. Francis and commissioned him to rebuild His Church). The cross is beautiful - the colors are vibrant, and the figure of Jesus is both haunting and inviting at the same time.

It is one of those truly amazing distinctives about Christianity - that the instrument of death and destruction could be redeemed into an instrument of life and grace. To be crucified was a shameful and very painful death in the first century. The cross was a symbol of the Roman Empire's domination and rule. When entering Rome, the Appian Way had hundreds of crosses lining the road so that anyone who entered into Rome passed by this very clear threat: "You mess with Caesar, and this is what will happen to you." Jesus, the only truly innocent and perfect man, was wrongfully and painfully put to death on a cross on Mt. Calvary. However, three days later He rose from the dead and that instrument of death was redeemed into an instrument of life.

If memory serves, it was St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, who made the journey to the Holy Land in search of relics and returned with pieces of the Cross of Christ. This would have been especially poignant for her, as her son's conversion involved a vision of the Cross of Christ. While the Cross had been associated with Christianity prior to the conversion of Constantine (martyrs often crossed themselves as a witness to the audience in the amphitheater or circus, in order to indicate that they were being put to death for their faith and not because they were criminals), after Helena returned to Rome from the Holy Land the Cross became the single most identifiable sign of a Christian and a Christian Community. One would be hard pressed to find a church that did not have a cross. This transformed symbol of death to life is not worshiped, but is seen as a symbol of God's divine mercy - that by Jesus' death and

resurrection, reconciliation was offered to fallen man.

Equally, as we recently heard from our Sunday Gospel readings, Jesus challenges every Christian: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mt. 16:26) This is not always a challenge to martyrdom, but it is always a challenge to live a life that is sacrificially offered to the Glory of God, for the benefit of others.

My prayer for you and my prayer for me is that on this the Feast of the Holy Cross, we may marvel in the fact that Jesus died for us - that by his death we have life and we are called to offer our lives for the sake of others. And to that I say, AMEN!

I pray you all a very blessed week!

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions 14 & 15*

#### **1. How may a person repent and place faith in Jesus Christ?**

Anyone may repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ at any time. One way to do this is by sincerely saying a prayer similar to the Prayer of Repentance and Faith given above. (John 15:16; Acts 16:31-34; Romans 10:9; Hebrews 12:12)

#### **2. What should you do once you have turned to God for salvation in repentance and faith?**

If I have not already been baptized, following proper instruction, I should be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and thus into membership in his Body, the Church. (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Week of Pentecost 15 - Proper 20**



***"Grant us, O Lord, not to mind earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to cleave to those that shall abide; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***

I am reading - for about the 9th time - the book *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Pastor Rick Warren. This book begins with one of the best first lines of a book that I can remember (short of "In the beginning..."): "IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU." The book speaks to the primary issue of the difference between being Earthly-minded and Kingdom-minded. Earthly-minded thinking centers on the self, and Kingdom-minded thinking centers on our Triune God!

This week's collect speaks to the same issue. In it, we petition the Lord to grant us the ability to keep our eyes fixed on Christ and not on the things of this world. This, of course, is nothing new; scripture is full of the call for this kind of single-mindedness. A couple of weeks ago we read: ***"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*** (Romans 12:2)

This week's Gospel lesson - the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard - addresses this same issue. On the surface, this is a story about different laborers who are called to work in the vineyard at different times of the day, thus working for different amounts of time. This difference in time is not the main issue - the issue is the laborers' expectations of "fairness" or "justice." The first laborers agreed with the Master of the House for a denarius for a day's labor (the normal pay). Thus, when they see the other laborers coming on to work, their expectation is that: a) they will either be better rewarded than the new laborers, or b) that the newer laborers will be paid less.

This is Earthly-minded thinking: that justice depends on our being equal to, or better than, those around us. And yet Jesus tells the mother of James and John that: ***"...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,***

**and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-28 ESV)**

A Kingdom-minded way of thinking places our importance - our needs and wants - second to those of the Lord, and we demonstrate that by serving others. My prayer for you, and my prayer for me, is that the Lord will indeed grant us - at all times and in all places - a Kingdom-minded way of thinking. And to that I say...AMEN!

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions 16-18*

#### **16. What does God grant in saving you?**

God grants me reconciliation with him (2 Corinthians 5:17-18), forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14), adoption into his family (Galatians 4:5-7), citizenship in his kingdom (Ephesians 2:19-21, Philippians 3:20), union with him in Christ (Romans 6:3-5), new life in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5), and the promise of eternal life (John 3:16).

#### **17. What does God desire to accomplish in your life in Christ?**

God desires to transform me into the image of Jesus Christ my Lord, by the power of his Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

#### **18. How does God transform you?**

He will transform me over time through corporate and private worship, prayer, and Bible reading; fellowship with God's people; pursuit of holiness of life; witness toward those who do not know Christ; and acts of love toward all. The first Christians set this pattern as they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the week of Pentecost 16 - Proper 21**



***"O God, who declarest thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running to obtain thy promises, may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***

One of the most powerful and haunting movies I've ever seen is the movie *Schindler's List*. For several years, I watched it twice a year as I showed it to my Ethics class at The Bishop's School. There is one scene in the movie where Oscar Schindler - a self-serving profiteer of the war - comes to grips with the reality of the evil of the Nazis. In that scene, Schindler is speaking with Amon Goeth - a Labor Camp Commandant who is drunk with power and is randomly shooting Jews in the labor camp from his rooftop patio; a course of action giving credence to Lord John Dalberg-Acton's phrase: "Power corrupts: absolute power corrupts absolutely."

**Schindler:** Power is when we have every justification to kill, and we don't.

**Goeth:** You think that's power?

**Schindler:** That's what the Emperor said. A man steals something, he's brought in before the Emperor, he throws himself down on the ground. He begs for his life, he knows he's going to die. And the Emperor... pardons him. This worthless man, he lets him go.

**Goeth:** I think you are drunk.

**Schindler:** That's power, Amon. That is power.

This week's Collect captures the almighty power of God who, in fact, has every justification to destroy His creation and simply start over, but instead shows mercy and pity. God demonstrates this first with Noah, in His decision to never flood the earth again (Genesis 8:20-21). God's mercy was shown in the saving of Isaac, the firstborn son of Abraham (Genesis 22). Last week's lesson from Jonah also demonstrated God's character - much to Jonah's displeasure - in saving the people of Nineveh who repented. But, chiefly, God's love and mercy are demonstrated by the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross for our sins.



Jesus' death and resurrection demonstrate God's mercy, but that does not mean that there are no consequences for sin. We - each and every man, woman, and child ever born - will one day stand before the great judgement seat of Christ. On that day, we will not simply hope for, but count upon, God's character being unchanging. God's character is to show love and mercy - as Jonah so aptly said: ***"This is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing."*** (Jonah 4:2)

The question isn't *IS* God merciful - we know He is. The question is, what will *WE DO* in response to the gift of His mercy? That is why this collect begs: "...grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running to obtain thy promises, may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure...."

O God, in your great love inspire us to be merciful, loving, and gracious to others, as you are to us! And to that I say...AMEN.

I pray every blessing upon you all!

Bishop Menees

### Catechism Questions # 19-21

## ARTICLE I: FAITH IN GOD "I BELIEVE" - Concerning the Creeds

### **19. What is a creed?**

A creed is a statement of faith. The word "creed" comes from the Latin credo, which means "I believe."

### **20. What is the purpose of the Creeds?**

The purpose of the Creeds is to declare and safeguard God's truth about himself, ourselves, and creation, as revealed in Holy Scripture.

**21. What does belief in the Creeds signify?**

Belief in the Creeds signifies acceptance of God's revealed truth, and the intention to live by it.

# "To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."

## Bishop's Note: Collect for the week of Pentecost 17 - Proper 22



*"Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."*

This week's collect calls to mind the story from the Gospel of Mark. A father brings his son to Jesus. The son has suffered for some time from demons who would torment and harm him. The father said to Jesus, *"But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."* And Jesus said to him, *"If you can!" All things are possible for one who believes.* Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, *'I believe; help my unbelief!'*" (Mark 9:22-24)

The father approached Jesus seeking compassion on his son, only to discover that Jesus had already desired to heal him. The father exclaims, "I believe; help my unbelief!" When we pray this collect this week, we proclaim the reality that God is more ready to hear than we are to pray. How often have we said, "I don't want to bother God with something so small and insignificant," when in reality, the Lord wants to hear our prayers; He wants to receive our petitions? Perhaps our fear is that God is like us - that He gets tired and short tempered and doesn't want to be bothered. But that is NOT the character of God. God's character is not only ready to hear, but also ready to respond to our need.

Additionally, it is not only God's character to respond to our physical needs - food & clothing - but our spiritual and emotional needs as well. "...pour upon us the abundance of thy mercy, forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid..." The need for forgiveness is a deep need that we are often afraid of. And yet the Lord's desire is to forgive us, in order to restore our relationship with Him. Not that *He* needs reconciliation with us, but that we need reconciliation with Him.

Thanks be to God that we are loved beyond our wildest imagination, at our deepest core!

And to that I say...AMEN.

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day.

Bishop Menees

Confirmation Questions 22 - 24

**22. Which Creeds does the Church acknowledge?**

The Church acknowledges the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. (Articles of Religion, 8)

**23. Why do you acknowledge these Creeds?**

I acknowledge these Creeds with the Church because they are grounded in Holy Scripture and are faithful expressions of its teaching. (1 Corinthians 15:3-11; Philippians 2:6-11)

**24. Why should you know these Creeds?**

I should know these Creeds because they state the essential beliefs of the Christian faith.

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for Pentecost 18 - Proper 23**

*"Lord, we pray thee that thy grace may always precede and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."*



One of the things I often get asked is whether or not I have any regrets about leaving San Diego - with perfect weather and no lawsuits directly affecting me - for Fresno and, well, imperfect weather and lawsuits? The answer is, both yes and no. I miss the weather, I will not lie; however I do not regret for a second coming to the Diocese of San Joaquin, even with less than desirable weather and the uncertainties of an apparently fickle legal system. Why? Because of God's Grace.

Grace is that unwarranted and unmerited love of God that fills in the gaps and supports us especially in the most difficult of days. In this week's collect, Archbishop Cranmer acknowledges the continual need we, as humans, have for God's Grace to go before and behind us.

This coming Sunday I will have the honor of ordaining Dcn. Ryan Bradley to the Sacred Order of Priests. At the service, one of the hymns that Dcn. Bradley has chosen is *St. Patrick's Breastplate*, which speaks of this type of Grace. St. Patrick, the presumed author of the hymn, wrote about the need to have Christ all around us to guide, support, and lead us. As you read these words - a portion of the hymn - allow them to flow across your lips as a prayer:

Christ be with me,

Christ within me,

Christ behind me,

Christ before me,

Christ beside me,  
Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort  
and restore me.  
Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet,  
Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of  
all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of  
friend and stranger.

I would be willing to bet that Archbishop Cranmer was familiar with some version of this hymn, and in any case was familiar with this theology: We bind ourselves to Christ, but it is only by Christ's all encompassing love and support that we can do any ministry at all. And to that I say, Amen!

I pray you all a very blessed week!

Bishop Menees

### Confirmation Questions: 25-27

#### **25. What is the Apostles' Creed?**

The Apostles' Creed says:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

## **26. What is Holy Scripture?**

Holy Scripture is “God's Word written” (Articles of Religion, 20), given by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles as the revelation of God and his acts in human history, and is therefore the Church's final authority in all matters of faith and practice. (2 Timothy 3:16)

## **27. What books are contained in Holy Scripture?**

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament form the whole of Holy Scripture, which is also called the Bible and the canon. (Articles of Religion, 6)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Week of Pentecost 19 - Proper 24**



*"Almighty and everlasting God, who in Christ hast revealed thy glory among the nations: Preserve the works of thy mercy, that thy Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of thy Name; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."*

This week's collect begins by declaring Christ's Glory among the nations! How does that happen? It happens when the Church takes her rightful place among the people of all nations. How powerful it is to witness the people of God, as the Church of God, acting like the adopted children of God in the four corners of the earth.

I think of my experiences at Santa Maria Magdalena in Juliaca, Peru. Juliaca is a town that sits at 12,500 feet above sea level in the Andes. Bishop Godfrey, the Anglican Bishop of Peru, had a vision for a church on the mountaintop and sent different missionaries to meet with and love the people of Juliaca. When I arrived, a priest and deacon were stationed there - both were single and willing to live at poverty level in a place with few creature comforts. Fr. Ruben & Dcn. Luis went out into the community daily to talk with people, pray with them, to share food, clothing, and medicine with them, and, most importantly, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them. Slowly but surely the church grew, and the two of them began to be accompanied by more and more laypeople who were empowered to love and serve the Lord. The impact this little church had was, and is, far beyond the number of people or the size of their budget.

The story of Santa Magdalena has been, and will continue to be, retold hundreds of thousands of times, if not millions of times, around the world. Wherever the Church faithfully proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ and Christians act in love and charity, the Glory of Christ is made evident.

This Lord's Day, as we gather in our churches, homes, and storefronts to worship, I pray that we will seek God's grace and strength to go far and wide in order to make the Name of Jesus known by our words and deeds.



I pray you all a blessed week!

Bishop Menees

Catechism Questions 28 - 30

**28. What is in the Old Testament?**

The Old Testament contains the record of God's creation of all things, mankind's original disobedience, God's calling of Israel to be his people, God's law, God's wisdom, God's saving deeds, and the teaching of God's prophets. The Old Testament points to Christ, revealing God's intention to redeem and reconcile the world through Christ.

**29. What is in the New Testament?**

The New Testament contains the record of Jesus Christ's birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, the Church's early ministry, the teaching of the Apostles, and the revelation of Christ's coming eternal Kingdom.

**30. How are the Old and New Testaments related to each other?**

The Old Testament is to be read in the light of Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, and the New Testament is to be read in light of God's revelation to Israel. As Saint Augustine says, "the New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed." (Hebrews 8:1-7; Augustine, *Questions in the Heptateuch* 2.73)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for Pentecost 20 - Proper 25**



***"Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."***

It's hard to pray this Collect and not immediately recognize that Archbishop Cranmer was referring to St. Paul and 1st Corinthians 13:13: ***"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*** This past Saturday, I witnessed a little slice of heaven as Fr. Derek Thomason, who is battling cancer, presided at the marriage service between his son, Matthew, and Matthew's bride, Tirzah. The Epistle reading was, you guessed it, 1st Corinthians 13.

St. Paul lays out, in Chapter 12, a list of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in Chapter 13 he goes on to make clear that the greatest gift of God is the gift of LOVE. Love is the gift that sustains and supports all of the other gifts of the Spirit. As St. Paul says: ***"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."*** (1 Cor. 13:1-3) Therefore, if Love is the supporting Grace of God that allows for the fruitful exercise of the Spiritual Gifts, then we should pray earnestly for God to grant us the gift of Love. As I write this, I am convicted that I do not ask God to grant me the gift of love often enough. As a result, I have begun praying already that the Lord would grant me this gift in spades.

The second half of the Collect is equally as beautiful. It links receiving the promise of God with the desire to love God's commands. To put this in relational terms: As Florence and I began to date and my interest in her as a person turned into warm feelings for her, which proceeded to turn into a deep and profound love for her, my desire to please her grew greater and greater. In desiring to please her, I desired to do as she would like.

If we draw this very incomplete analogy to our relationship with our Heavenly Father, then the greater the love we have, the greater desire we have to please Him and, thus, to follow His commandments.

In short, this collect asks for God's grace and assistance in fulfilling the Great Commandment: *"You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. This is the first and great commandment and the next is like unto it; love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."* And to that I say...AMEN!

I pray you all a blessed Lord's Day!

Bishop Menees

### Catechism Questions 31 - 33

#### **31. What does it mean that Holy Scripture is inspired?**

Holy Scripture is "God-breathed," for the biblical authors wrote under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit to record God's Word. (2 Timothy 3:16)

#### **32. What does it mean that the Bible is the Word of God?**

Because the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is rightly called the Word of God written. God is revealed in his mighty works and in the incarnation of our Lord, but his works and his will are made known to us through the inspired words of Scripture. God "has spoken through the prophets" (Nicene Creed), and continues to speak through the Bible today. (Hebrews 1:1-2; 3:7-11; 10:15-17; 12:25-27)

#### **33. Why is Jesus Christ called the Word of God?**

The fullness of God's revelation is found in Jesus Christ, who not only fulfills the Scriptures, but is himself God's Word, the living expression of God's mind. The Scriptures testify about him: "In the beginning was the Word" and "The Word became

flesh and dwelt among us.” Therefore, “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” (John 1:1, 14; Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, prologue)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Feast of All Saints & All Souls**



*"Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen."*

Yesterday, on the feast of Saints Simon & Jude, I had the honor of leading a group of thirty evangelical pastors in the service of Morning Prayer. This was a very new and different service for my brothers, who are used to a more freewheeling type of prayer service. I was clear to point out that our worship has its roots in the first centuries of Christianity and the beginning of the monastic movement. At this service, eyebrows were raised as our prayers and canticles referenced the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints Simon & Jude - not the normal fare for evangelical pastors!

Why is it that we remember the saints? Well, because their lives reflect the Kingdom of God, as well as men and women's ability to connect with the Lord and serve Him in love and obedience. Our Lord Himself regularly pointed to the lives of saints - Abraham, Moses, and Elijah just to name a few. Those men, like the saints of the church, are witnesses to the Grace of God in the past, and proclaimers of the Grace of God for the present and future.

It is interesting how the lives of certain saints call out to us and connect with us individually. For me, St. Francis of Assisi has been a tremendous inspiration and example. His life is very well documented - both the good and the bad. Francis was a redeemed sinner seeking to be obedient to our Lord and His call upon his life. While no saint, I too am a redeemed sinner seeking to be obedient to our Lord and His call upon my life.

This Lord's Day, as you gather with fellow believers around the altar of the Lord to hear the Word faithfully preached and to receive the sacraments faithfully administered, I pray that you will call to mind and remember the Saints of the Lord - their lives and their examples of love, obedience, and grace.

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you journey toward living the life of a saint!

Bishop menees

*Catechism Questions 34 - 36*

**34. How should Holy Scripture be interpreted?**

Just as Holy Scripture was not given through private interpretation of things, so it must also be translated, read, preached, taught, and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the Church's historic and consensual reading of it. (2 Peter 1:20-21; Jerusalem Declaration; Articles of Religion, 2)

**35. How should belief in the God of the Bible affect your life?**

As I prayerfully learn Holy Scripture, I should expect the Holy Spirit to use it to teach, rebuke, correct and train me in the righteousness that God desires. This nourishes my soul toward the service of God and my neighbor. (2 Timothy 3:16)

**36. How should you use the Holy Scriptures in daily life?**

I should “hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them” (Book of Common Prayer) so that, by patience and strengthening through God’s Word, I may embrace and cling to the hope of everlasting life given to me in Jesus Christ. I should read and pray Scripture daily, that I may know God’s truth and proclaim it clearly to the whole world.

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 22nd Week of Pentecost - Proper 27**



***"O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant us, we beseech thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves even as he is pure; that, when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. Amen."***

This week's Collect is a powerful one that speaks to the character of God and the mission of His only begotten son - Jesus Christ. God's character is revealed in His continuous desire to be reconciled with His primary creation - man. The two primary obstacles to that reconciliation are Satan and man himself. Jesus' mission, therefore, is to bind and destroy Satan and to adopt and reconcile man to the Father.

Jesus, of course, is first recorded as confronting Satan following Jesus' baptism and his preparation in the desert, when he faced the temptations of Satan. Jesus is able to foil Satan and resist his temptations by reliance upon the Word of God. Jesus demonstrated to us how to resist the devil's temptations. Jesus, just a year or so later teaches his disciples that they also have power, in the Name of Jesus, over Satan. What liberation - what joy - to know that despite what Hollywood says, Satan has no power over us if we but resist him in the mighty name of Jesus! ***"17 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' 18 And he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.'"*** (Luke 10:17-19)

Even though Jesus has taught us to temporarily bind Satan and his demons with Jesus' own mighty name, the ultimate destruction of Satan and his demons will come with Jesus' return and the great apocalypse described in the Revelation of St. John. Because God's Word announces Jesus' victory in advance, we need not worry about that aspect of the future. Instead we are too focus on the present and learning what it means to be God's adopted children.

This is the second part of this collect - that we who believe in the name of Jesus are adopted as Children of God. This is a very important doctrine of the church, and a place where too many mainline denominations have gotten it wrong. I came to Christ as a young man and just took as gospel what the Episcopal church was teaching; that "...all people are children of God." I never challenged that teaching until one day, in reading the the first chapter of the gospel of John, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit. What did I read? ***"11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*** (John 1:11-13, emphasis added) Scripture is clear that not all of us are children of God, but only those who receive Jesus and believe in his name!

Why is this so important? Because, if we buy the lie that ALL people are children of God, then there is no need to share the gospel with anyone; no need to invite people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. By not sharing the gospel and inviting people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ we are saying, in effect, "Go to hell; I don't really care about you."

This is not to say that we can neglect to treat every person with the utmost dignity, love, and charity. Why? Because scripture is clear that we are all created in the image of God and are therefore deserving of respect!

Ultimately, we can only bind Satan, treat all people with respect and dignity, and share the Gospel with others, because God answers our prayers! Remember that this Lord's Day, as you gather together for worship!

I pray you all a blessed week!

Bishop Menees

### Catechism Questions 37 - 39

#### **37. What other books does the Church acknowledge?**

The canon of Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation. The fourteen books of the Apocrypha may also be read "for example of life and instruction of manners," but "not to establish any doctrine" (Articles of Religion, 6).

#### **38. Who is God?**



God is one divine Being eternally existing in three divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the Holy Trinity. (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19)

**39. According to Holy Scripture, what is the nature and character of God?**

“God is love” (1 John 4:16). Sharing an eternal communion of love between the three Persons, God loves and mercifully redeems fallen creation. “God is holy” (Psalm 99; Isaiah 6:1-4). God is utterly transcendent, good, righteous, and opposed to all sin and evil. God’s love is holy, God’s holiness is loving, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the fullest expression of God’s whole character. (Hebrews 1:3; John 1:18; 17:21; Colossians 1:19)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 28**



If you have followed along in the weekly Bishop's Note for all of this Church Year, you may notice that this week's collect was addressed in Advent 2. This is because I began this series of Notes by following the 1662 order of collects, rather than the 1979. Thus, I would refer you to my Advent 2 Bishop's Note for the collect you'll hear in church this Sunday.

This week, I would like to offer you a collect written by Archbishop Cranmer; one that I pray every morning and evening in the daily office.

**A PRAYER FOR THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE:**

***"Almighty and everlasting God, who alone workest great marvels; Send down upon our Bishops, and Curates, and all Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. Amen"***

I suspect that Archbishop Cranmer added this prayer in the daily office, along with the collects for mission, so that, not only would the faithful be looking ahead at the spread of the Gospel, but that they would also ask God to bless our congregations and our clergy, who form the local expression of the Body of Christ!

First, this collect acknowledges that it is God alone who works miracles (marvels). God is the source of all good, all health, and all grace. I sense that we know that with our heads, but I fear that we don't believe it with our hearts. We buy into the myth that if we just try hard enough we can do it, and if we just can't, well *then* it's OK to call on the Lord and His strength. We fail to recognize that anything and everything we have or accomplish is a gift from God.

Second, this collect calls upon God's grace and health to bless our Bishops and Curates (priests and deacons serving in congregations) as His instruments in the local congregation. I can't emphasize enough the need to pray for our clergy. I consider myself extremely blessed to have the Little Brothers and Sisters of Sacrifice, along with the Bishop's Chapter of the Daughters of the Holy Cross, praying for me daily. I can't imagine how I could face a single day of ministry in the diocese without those intercessors petitioning the Lord, on my behalf, to grant me strength, wisdom, and discernment.

Lastly, this collect acknowledges that God's answer to our prayers not only blesses us, but also brings honor and glory to Him. How amazing that is, that God uses His grace to bless us and to bring glory and honor to Himself.

My prayer every morning, as Florence and I sit in our comfy prayer chairs, is that God will richly bless each and every priest and deacon in the Diocese of San Joaquin, that they may be used as an instrument of the Lord to bless the congregations that they serve and bring honor and glory to the Lord!

I pray you all a very blessed week.

Bishop Menees

### *Catechism Questions 40-42*

#### **40. Who is God the Father?**

God the Father is the first Person of the Holy Trinity, from whom the Son is eternally begotten and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds. (John 1:1, 14; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26, Nicene Creed)

#### **41. Why do you call the first of the three divine Persons “Father?”**

Our Lord Jesus called God “Father” and taught his disciples to do the same, and St. Paul teaches that God adopts believers as his children and heirs in Christ, sending his Holy Spirit into our hearts crying “Abba, Father.” (Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7).

**42. What do you mean when you call God “Father?”**

When I call God “Father,” I acknowledge that I was created by God for relationship with him, that God made me in his image, that I trust in God as my Protector and Provider, and that I put my hope in God as his child and heir in Christ. (Genesis1:26, Matthew 6:25-33; Romans 8:16-17)

**"To Lead an Apostolic Community, Under Authority, That Brings People to Jesus Christ."**

**Bishop's Note: Collect for the Last Sunday of Pentecost - Feast of Christ the King**



***"Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in thy well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."***

On the Feast of the Ascension we celebrated the fact that Jesus ascended into heaven, where He sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf and waiting - waiting for the Father's word that the time is right; right for restoration; right for redemption; right for His return.

As we enter into the Season of Advent, we focus on our need to prepare for Jesus' second advent, when He will complete the restoration that He began with His birth in that manger in Bethlehem two thousand years ago.

While in His first advent He came as an helpless babe, His second advent will be as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Revelation to St. John gives us a tremendous image in Chapter 19, beginning at the 11th verse: ***"15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."*** (Revelation 19:15-16) This is no helpless babe - this is an avenging King who comes in godly strength and power.

The purpose of His "...rule with a rod of iron..." is to free all believers - worldwide - from bondage to sin. How awesome and wonderful that day will be! We should not expect this day with fear and dread, but with joy and anticipation that God's Word will be fulfilled and that we will gather around the throne of God, glorifying Him exactly as the prophet Isaiah envisioned: ***"6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered***

*his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:1-7)*

And to that I say AMEN!

I pray you all a very blessed Lord's Day and Season Advent!

Bishop Menees

#### Catechism Questions 43 - 45

#### **43. Why do you say that God the Father is "Almighty?"**

I call the Father "Almighty" because he has power over everything and accomplishes everything he wills. Together with his Son and Holy Spirit, the Father is all-knowing and ever present in every place. (I Chronicles 29:10-13; Psalm 139)

#### **44. Why do you call God the Father "Creator?"**

I call God the Father "Creator" because he is the sole designer and originator of everything that exists. He creates and sustains all things through his Word, and gives life to all creatures through his Spirit. (Genesis 1; 2:7; Job 33:4; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:3)

#### **45. How does recognizing God as Creator affect your understanding of his creation?**

I acknowledge that God made for his own glory everything that exists. He created human beings in his image, male and female, to serve him as creation's stewards, managers and caretakers. He entrusts his good creation to us as a gift to enjoy and a responsibility to fulfill. (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15; Revelation 4:11)