**ADDITIONAL READINGS FROM CHRISTIAN THINKERS AND THEOLOGIANS**

**LENT DEVOTIONS, 2024**

**READING FOR THE FIRST WEEK:**

**March 7: Martin Luther in his Large Catechism explanation of: “And lead us not into temptation.”**

We have now heard enough what toil and labor is required to retain all that for which we pray, and to persevere therein, which, however, is not achieved without infirmities and stumbling. Besides, although we have received forgiveness and a good conscience and are entirely acquitted, yet is our life of such a nature that one stands to-day and to-morrow falls. Therefore, even though we be godly now and stand before God with a good conscience, we must pray again that He would not suffer us to relapse and yield to trials and temptations.

Temptation, however, or (as our Saxons in olden times used to call it) Bekoerunge, is of three kinds, namely, of the flesh, of the world and of the devil. For in the flesh we dwell and carry the old Adam about our neck, who exerts himself and incites us daily to inchastity, laziness, gluttony and drunkenness, avarice and deception, to defraud our neighbor and to overcharge him, and, in short, to all manner of evil lusts which cleave to us by nature, and to which we are incited by the society, example and what we hear and see of other people, which often wound and inflame even an innocent heart.

Next comes the world, which offends us in word and deed, and impels us to anger and impatience. In short, there is nothing but hatred and envy, enmity, violence and wrong, unfaithfulness, vengeance, cursing, raillery slander, pride and haughtiness, with superfluous finery, honor, fame, and power, where no one is willing to be the least, but every one desires to sit at the head and to be seen before all.

Then comes the devil, inciting and provoking in all directions, but especially agitating matters that concern the conscience and spiritual affairs, namely, to induce us to despise and disregard both the Word and works of God to tear us away from faith, hope, and love and bring us into misbelief, false security, and obduracy, or, on the other hand, to despair, denial of God, blasphemy, and innumerable other shocking things. These are indeed snares and nets, yea, real fiery darts which are shot most venomously into the heart, not by flesh and blood, but by the devil.

Great and grievous, indeed, are these dangers and temptations which every Christian must bear, even though each one were alone by himself, so that every hour that we are in this vile life where we are attacked on all sides, chased and hunted down, we are moved to cry out and to pray that God would not suffer us to become weary and faint and to relapse into sin, shame, and unbelief. For otherwise it is impossible to overcome even the least temptation.

This, then, is leading us not into temptation, to wit, when He gives us power and strength to resist, the temptation, however, not being taken away or removed. For while we live in the flesh and have the devil about us, no one can escape temptation and allurements; and it cannot be otherwise than that we must endure trials, yea, be engulfed in them; but we pray for this, that we may not fall and be drowned in them.

**READINGS ON PRIDE:**

**March 11: Martin Luther**

Hence it is that God often permits a man to fall into grievous sin or to remain there, in order that he may be put to shame in his own eyes and in the eyes of all men. Otherwise, had he remained constant in his great gifts and virtues, he could not have kept himself from his great vice of vainglory or fame. And so God must, as it were, ward off this sin by other grievous sins, that His name alone may retain its honor. In this way, one sin becomes the remedy of another. This is due to our perverse wickedness, which not only commits evil but also misuses all that is good.

**March 12: Martin Luther**

Pride of the gifted makes them worse than others. In other words, it is the worst kind of vice and the most demonic kind of pride for us to commend ourselves and pat ourselves on the back if we see or feel some special gift in ourselves. We do not thank God for it; but we become so proud and contemptuous of others and so preoccupied with it that we so not pay attention to whatever else we are doing, and we imagine that we are in fine shape. We steal and rob God of His glory this way, and we make ourselves an idol, without seeing the trouble we cause by all this. If it is true that your gift is greater than somebody else’s, this is as it must be, because your office is different, higher and greater. But when you go on to use you gift as a mirror in which you admire yourself, you spoil it completely and make this sublime ornament filthier than everybody else’s faults.

**March 13: Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

In confession occurs the breakthrough of the Cross. The root of all sin is pride, superbia. I want to be my own law, I have a right to my self, my hatred and my desires, my life and my death. The mind and flesh of man are set on fire by pride; for it is precisely in his wickedness that man wants to be as God. Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride...In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother - which means, before God - we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation. The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we share in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life.”

**March 14: C.S. Lewis**

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice.…

The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility.… According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.

Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, “How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?” The point is that each person’s pride is in competition with everyone else’s pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise.

Two of a trade never agree. Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If every one else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about.

It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

The Christians are right: it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But Pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

**READINGS ON ENVY:**

**March 19: Martin Luther**

Many folk are not happy unless they have done harm or see that their fellow man is faring poorly. They are like that venomous animal, the salamander, which is so cold that it can live and sustain itself even in fire. In like manner, these folk live and become fat on the harm done to other people. There you have the precious brood of the devil, the touchy Mr. Envy, who is sorry to see that someone is doing well and would gladly lose one of his eyes to keep his neighbor from having any eyes at all.

**AND**

But the hireling and mercenaries grow green with envy when they observe that they are not first and foremost in possessing the good things of God; instead of praising, they murmur because they are made equal to, or lower than, others, like the laborers in the Gospel (Matt, 20:11-12) who murmured against the householder, not because he did them any wrong but because he made them equal to the other laborers by giving to all the same penny.  
Even so we find men today who do not praise the goodness of God because they cannot see that they have received the same things as St. Peter or any other of the saints, or as this or that man living on earth, They imagine they also would praise and love God if they possessed as much as these, and they despise the good gifts of God which are showered so abundantly on them and which they altogether overlook – such as life, body, reason, goods, honor, friends, and the ministration of the sun and all created things. They act as they do because they look above them and not beneath them; if they looked beneath them, they would find many that have not half of what they have and yet are content in God and sing His praise.

**March 20: Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. The important thing is neither that bitterness nor envy should have gnawed at the heart during this time, that we should have come to look with new eyes at matters great and small, sorrow and joy, strength and weakness, that our perception of generosity, humanity, justice and mercy should have become clearer, freer, less corruptible. We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune. This perspective from below must not become the partisan possession of those who are eternally dissatisfied; rather, we must do justice to life in all its dimensions from a higher satisfaction, whose foundation is beyond any talk of ‘from below’ or ‘from above’. This is the way in which we may affirm it.

**March 21: Charles Spurgeon**

When we see the wicked prosper we are apt to envy them. When we hear the noise of their mirth, and our own spirit is heavy, we half think that they have the best of it. This is foolish and sinful. If we knew them better, and specially if we remembered their end, we should pity them.

The cure for envy lies in living under a constant sense of the divine presence, worshiping God and communing with Him all the day long, however long the day may seem. True religion lifts the soul into a higher region, where the judgment becomes more clear, and the desires are more elevated. The more of Heaven there is in our lives, the less of earth we shall covet. The fear of God casts out envy of men.

The death-blow of envy is a calm consideration of the future. The wealth and glory of the ungodly are a vain show. This pompous appearance flashes out for an hour, and then is extinguished. What is the prosperous sinner the better for his prosperity when judgment overtakes him? As for the godly man, his end is peace and blessedness, and none can rob him of his joy; wherefore, let him forego envy, and be filled with sweet content.

**READINGS ON ANGER:**

**March 26: Martin Luther**

This vice of anger uses the trick of making itself look good; for this is how we reason: That fellow has done this and that to me; I would be doing wrong if I did not look sour and be angry about it. I would be encouraging in wrongdoing. I must let the rascal be softened a bit; otherwise he will not do any good as long as he lives. If the heart is inclined to anger to begin with and, besides, now gets the notion that it is doing right and well by being angry, then the devil has won his game, the grudge grows greater from day to day, and the hearts become increasingly bitter toward one another.

**March 27: Martin Luther**

Somewhere the example of a monk is related which particularly please me. Overcome by his own contrariness and impatience, he left the monastery and withdrew to a deserted place. There he hoped to live in peace, untouched by any offense and sin. Now he happened to go to a spring to fetch some water in a jug and inadvertently overturned the jug, which he had filled with too much water. In anger he flung it to the ground and broke it. When he regained control of himself, he acknowledged that it had not been the fault of the people with whom he had lived that he had so often been moved to anger, but the fault of his nature and flesh, which were inclined to anger. Therefore he returned to the monastery and made an effort to control his emotions and to exercise patience.

**March 28: Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

The first law which Jesus commends to his disciples is the one which forbids murder and entrusts their brother's welfare to their keeping. The brother's life is a divine ordinance, and God alone has power over life and death. There is no place for the murderer among the people of God. The judgement he passes on others falls on the murderer himself. In this context 'brother" means more than "fellow-Christian": for the follower of Jesus there can be no limit as to who is his neighbour, except as his Lord decides. He is forbidden to commit murder under pain of divine judgement. For him the brother's life is a boundary which he dare not pass. Even anger is enough to overstep the mark, still more the casual angry word (Raca), and most of all the deliberate insult of our brother ("Thou fool").

Anger is always an attack on the brother's life, for it refuses to let him live and aims at his destruction. Jesus will not accept the common distinction between righteous indignation and unjustifiable anger. The disciple must be entirely innocent of anger, because anger is an offence against both God and his neighbour. Every idle word which we think so little of betrays our lack of respect for our neighbour, and shows that we place ourselves on a pinnacle above him and value our own lives higher than his. The angry word is a blow struck at our brother, a stab at his heart: it seeks to hit, to hurt and to destroy. A deliberate in sult is even worse, for we are then openly disgracing our brother in the eyes of the world, and causing others to despise him. With our hearts burning with hatred, we seek to annihilate his moral and material existence. We are passing judgement on him, and that is murder. And the murderer will himself be judged.

When a man gets angry with his brother and swears at him, when he publicly insults or slanders him, he is guilty of murder and forfeits his relation to God. He erects a barrier not only between himself and his brother, but also between himself and God. He no longer has access to him: his sacrifice, worship and prayer are not acceptable in his sight. For the Christian, worship cannot be divorced from the service of the brethren, as it was with the rabbis. If we despise our brother our worship is unreal, and it forfeits every divine promise. When we come before God with hearts full of contempt and unreconciled with our neighbours, we are, both individually and as a congregation, worshipping an idol. So long as we refuse to love and serve our brother and make him an object of contempt and let him harbour a grudge against me or the congregation, our worship and sacrifice will be unacceptable to God. Not just the fact that I am angry, but the fact that there is somebody who has been hurt, damaged and disgraced by me, who "has a cause against me," erects a barrier between me and God.

Let us therefore as a Church examine ourselves, and see whether we have not often enough wronged our fellow-men. Let us see whether we have tried to win popularity by falling in with the world's hatred, its contempt and its contumely. For if we do that we are murderers. Let the fellowship of Christ so examine itself to-day and ask whether, at the hour of prayer and worship, any accusing voices intervene and make its prayer vain. Let the fellowship of Christ examine itself and see whether it has given any token of the love of Christ to the victims of the world's contumely and contempt, any token of that love of Christ which seeks to preserve, support and protect life. Otherwise however liturgically correct our services are, and however devout our prayer, however brave our testimony, they will profit us nothing, nay rather, they must needs testify against us that we have as a Church ceased to follow our Lord. God will not be separated from our brother: he wants no honour for himself so long as our brother is dishonoured. God is the Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became the Brother of us all. Here is the final reason why God will not be separated from our brother. His only-begotten Son bore the shame and insults for his Father's glory. But the Father would not be separated from his Son, nor will he now turn his face from those whose likeness the Son took upon him, and for whose sake he bore the shame. The Incarnation is the ultimate reason why the service of God cannot be divorced from the service of man. He who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar. There is therefore only one way of following Jesus and of worshipping God, and that is to be reconciled with our brethren. If we come to hear the Word of God and receive the sacrament without first being reconciled with our neighbours, we shall come to our own damnation. In the sight of God we are murderers. Therefore "go thy way, first be reconciled with thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

**READINGS ON GREED:**

**April 2: Martin Luther**

How does it happen that although all of us are certainly Christians, or at least want to be such, we do not take this attitude of unconcern and neither comfort ourselves with abundance and surplus, nor are frightened by want and worrying about it? For is we faithfully and devotedly cling to God’s Word, there shall be no want. Christ takes care of us, and from this it must follow that we shall have something to eat.

**AND**

Everyone should conduct his trade, craft and business in such a way that he overcharges no one, cheats no one with false wares, is satisfied with a fair profit, and gives people something worthwhile for their penny. A man should give true weight and measure, and neither in buying nor in selling, should he seek his own advantage to the disadvantage of others. For everyone see what dishonesty is prevalent in all business transactions. He who deals honestly really gives alms, although he does no give anything for nothing and pockets a fair profit. Those, on the other hand, who dispose of their wares to advantage and seek only their own benefit really steal people’s money from their purses. As when, for instance, a baker makes a loaf of bread too small or adulterates the ingredients, when a wine merchant sells his wine at too high a price or adulterates it. And who wants to enumerate all the tricks that are used?

**April 3: C.S. Lewis**

The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and the death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

**April 4: Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

In our members there is a slumbering inclination toward desire, which is both sudden and fierce.  With irresistible power, desire seizes mastery of the flesh.  All at once a secret, smoldering fire is kindled.  The flesh burns and is in flames.  It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, our love of fame and power, or greed for money…

At this moment God is quite unreal to us. [Remember those words.] He loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real.  The only reality is the devil.  Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God…  The lust thus aroused envelopes the mind and will of a man in deepest darkness.  The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us.  The questions present themselves as, ” Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?” And, ” Is it really not permitted me, yes, expected of me now, here in my particular situation to appease desire?”

It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God….  Therefore the Bible teaches us in times of temptation in the flesh, there is one command:  Flee!  Flee fornication.  Flee idolatry.  Flee youthful lusts.  Flee the lusts of the world.  There is no resistance to Satan in lust other than flight.  Every struggle against lust in one’s own strength is doomed to failure.

**READINGS ON GLUTTONY:**

**April 7: The Rev. Jeffrey Proctor**

And so tonight we consider the sin of gluttony, & it’s twin, drunkenness. They go together. Gluttony is the idolatry of food, drunkenness the idolatry of drink. Food and drink. What you say of one, you can also say of the other.

Sin has disordered our eating and our drinking. Recall that the first sin was a sin of eating. Eve and Adam ate from a fruit that was forbidden to them. A false sacrament. The tree of knowing good and evil which brought death. Eve was tempted to do this by desire and pleasure. She saw that the fruit was beautiful, it was delicious, good for food, it was useful, made one wise. And reasoning from that, she did what God had said not to do. She ate. She enlisted Adam, and he ate. And our eating has been disordered ever since.

*From “A Lenten Devotion” by the Rev. Jeffrey Proctor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Phoenix, Arizona*

**April 10: St. Thomas Aquinas, a summary of his writings on Gluttony**

St. Aquinas believed that gluttony is a sin because it's an inordinate desire that ignores the rational purpose of the body. He also believed that gluttony can be overcome through fasting and abstinence.

How Aquinas described gluttony

* **Inordinate desire**: An inordinate desire is a desire that goes against reason and virtue. Gluttony is an excessive desire for food and drink.
* **Inordinate relationship with material things**: Gluttony can also be an inordinate relationship with material things. To be gluttonous, therefore, is not only to eat a lot. It means to treat material things - time, money, food, technology- as the ultimate end of our lives.
* **Idolatrous expectation**: Gluttony can also be an idolatrous expectation that eating and drinking will provide fullness for the soul.
* **Lack of gratitude**: Gluttony is a lack of gratitude for what we have.