

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

It has been said: “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” History sure has a way in repeating itself. And if history doesn’t necessarily repeat itself, it certainly mimics. As God reminds us: **“There is nothing new under the sun”** (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Well, the whole point of learning the past is so we don’t make the same mistakes as those who lived before us.

Paul, too, through the Holy Spirit, proclaims the same: **“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did”** (1 Corinthians 10:6).

So, it is true that if we do not remember the past, we are condemned to repeat it. It is also good to keep in mind that God cannot tolerate sin. He cannot participate or be connected to any sin.

Today on this Third Sunday in Lent, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to proclaim the way of escape from sin, while he issues warnings from Israel’s history so that we do not fall from God’s grace.

[Five Illustrations for Our Instruction]

Everyone of us faces temptation. But the way we respond to temptation is the issue. If we delight at the temptation, we succumb to sin. Today, Paul gives us a clear warning against sin. He does this through five illustrations from the history of Israel. Now, these illustrations were likely chosen because of their relevance to the ongoing situation in Corinth. You see, these Corinthians were prone to these sins, just as Israel was before them.

Paul informs us saying: “***Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did***” (1 Corinthians 10:6). This first illustration refers to how Israel yielded to an intense craving for the meat and vegetables that were plentiful in Egypt, and their bitter complaining about the manna.

Now, these foods were not necessarily evil, but they were evil because of their association with the idolatrous land of Egypt, and because the people preferred them over what God graciously gave them in the wilderness. In craving these things – by longing for the past – these people were preferring slavery, idolatry, and impurity to the worship of the one true God.

Likewise, many within the Church in Corinth preferred the meat offered in idol temples. And such coveting amounted to sin against the Tenth Commandment, “***You shall not covet,***” and was in itself a form of idolatry, that is, a sin against the First Commandment, “***You shall have no other gods.***”

This coveting can also foster grosser forms of idolatry, which leads to the second illustration. Paul writes: “***Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play’***” (1 Corinthians 10:7).

Paul, here, is referring to the golden calf incident. Here, Paul is warning the Corinthians against falling into similar idolatry. So, just as the Israelites had fallen to the temptation of sitting down and eating in honor of a false idol, which brought the Lord’s wrath, so some of the Corinthians were reclining and drinking in an idol’s temple. And this can only end in disaster.

In the case of the golden calf, the people’s worship denigrated into sexual immorality as “***they rose up to play***” (Exodus 32:6). This is about sexual play. So, breaking the First Commandment led them to also break the Sixth Commandment, “***You shall not commit adultery.***”

The Corinthians, too, were guilty of sexual immorality, since they tolerated prostitution, incest, and homosexuality. And for the sexually immoral, Paul warns us all that those who practice such things “***will not inherit the kingdom of God***” (1 Corinthians 6:9).

Paul continues: “***We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day***” (1 Corinthians 10:8). Just as the golden calf incident led to idol worship and from there to fornication, so this pattern was repeated at Shittim in the plains of Moab with his third illustration. While there, the Moabites invited the Israelites to participate in their fertility rites in honor of their false god Baal of Peor, which led to many of the Israelite men into having intercourse with the Moabite women. Since the Israelites disobeyed God by having relations outside the Israelite people, God sent a plague that left 23,000 dead in the wilderness.

Here, Paul is warning us to not fall into the same trap of idolatry, which leads to immorality.

Paul concludes with his fourth and fifth illustration: “***We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer***” (1 Corinthians 10:9-10). The Israelites certainly tested the Lord’s patience. Likewise, Christians ought not to follow Israel’s example in grumbling against the Lord. So, in response to their complaints against Moses and Aaron, “***the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah***” (Numbers 16:32).

Paul’s point is that if the Christians in Corinth persisted in their grumbling – *against Paul and his fellow apostles* – they ran the risk of suffering the same destruction. For the Church today, similar grumblings would be to question and even to rebel against the authority of the Scriptures, or even against pastors who faithfully proclaim and live by the Scriptures.

Paul sums it up this way: All these disasters happened to the Israelites as examples for us. These events were recorded not just for Israel’s sake, but for our instruction, so we would learn from their mistakes. Paul’s concern reflects that of Proverbs 16:18: “***Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.***” Likewise, those Corinthians who prided themselves on their power and freedom in the Spirit should be careful not to fall from grace.

Now, we may not have all the same idols as Israel and the Corinthian church, but we all have idols that we won’t let go that need to be smashed. What is your idol or your idols? Could it be your need for temporal safety? Could it be self-centered living? Could it be love of money and finances? Could it be longing for the past?

Could it be sexual lust or pornography? Could it be wanting to be told how to live from earthly princes?

We must all repent of our false idols, or else we will surely perish as those who did before us who failed to trust in God's provisions. You see, the life of a Christian is a life of repentance. We are all naturally prone to sin. Still, that is no excuse to God. Sin is not something to take lightly. We cannot stand in sin. We cannot live in sin. So, we must all turn away from sin – *repent* – and turn to Christ to receive His unconditional forgiveness.

[*The Way of Escape*]

Thanks be to God that He is faithful even when we aren't faithful. Even though we don't deserve it – *through His faithfulness* – He always provides the Way of escape from sin.

God provided Baptism and spiritual food and drink to His Israelite people, just as He does for us today.

At the Red Sea, the covenant people “**were baptized into Moses**” (1 Corinthians 10:2). There, they submitted to Moses' leadership as he guided them through the waters and when they saw what the Lord accomplished there, they “**believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses**” (Exodus 14:31).

Just as they received a type of Baptism, so they also received a type of the Lord's Supper. All of them were sustained by the manna, which is the “grain of heaven” and the “bread of angels,” which the Lord “**rained ... on them to eat**” (Psalm 78:24). Likewise, they all received “**the same spiritual drink**,” which the Lord provided them with the miraculous water from the Rock. Jesus was the spiritual Rock who accompanied Israel.

We, too, experience the real presence of God in the Means of Grace: Word and Sacrament. Christ is present in the Scriptures and in His Sacraments. His presence provides the way out of sins that continue to tempt us and threaten us with death.

In the Lord's Supper, Christ – *the very Lamb of God who gave His life for the sins of the world* – gives us His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This forgiveness sets us free from our sinful past, in which eternal death was our only future. Each time we receive Christ's Body and Blood, He gives us new life and a new future, for where sin is forgiven, there is life with God and salvation everlasting.

We have the way of escape from sin and death and don't forget it! So, repent and trust in God and His Word. He alone is faithful, the Rock Jesus who feeds us with His "spiritual food" and pours out His "spiritual drink" for our forgiveness. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

† SOLI DEO GLORIA †