

**Invocabit (First Sunday in Lent): February 21, 2021**  
**“The Unmaking of Vain Makeup”**

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

St. Paul writes, “*Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.*”<sup>1</sup> There are two things that immediately stand out in this text, especially when read with Genesis 3 and Matthew 4. First, what is meant by working together? Second, what does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain?

To properly understand working together, one must first understand how to receive the grace of God in vain. The Second Commandment is given to direct man to the proper use of God’s Name—You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. This is what the false teachers in Corinth were doing. They were using God’s gifts of grace—His name, His word, His sacraments—in efforts to make themselves look good. This was not about being good. This was not about being right with God, it was about looking right, looking as though one was good with God.

That is the heart of what vanity is—puffing up the self. Vanity is the epitome of selfishness. The dictionary has two definitions of this word, which are fun to read together; first to be vain is to have or show an excessively high opinion of one's appearance, abilities, or worth. Second, to be vain is to produce no result, that is, useless. Vanity then is to show such a high opinion of your own self, which is actually useless.

To vainly use God’s Name is to take His word and smash it into a crumbling make-up to paint your face, in efforts that others will not see your deep porous flaws of ugliness of sin and death. This is highlighted by the Old Testament reading this morning. Eve had heard God’s preached word. She didn’t receive it with joy, but instead despised it; there was something else that might give her joy, more joy. Adam heard the word from God Himself, and as God’s first preacher, he did not hold it sacred. Instead of defending his wife and the Word of God, he allowed his wife to not only be deceived, but he himself desired to know more than what God had given him to know. The word of God was not enough for Adam and Eve. They needed something more, something showy, flashy, fancy, something more worldly that appealed to the senses.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:1

They wanted to be like God; they wanted to work with Him; because after all, God needed the help, right? They fell into the temptation of building themselves into such a high worth that they were not just the pinnacle of God's creation and stewards of His gifts; they were gods themselves.

Of course, they were dust; they were creation. They were not God, and thus due to their position of headship in creation, all of creation is subjected to sin. Man must eat by the sweat of his brow. The woman will have pain bearing children. Worse, there is now a fight between who is the head of the family. There will be a struggle over the desire to rule, and power in all forms of authority—family, church, earthly government—will be fought for, and meted out unjustly.

Mankind was not just left to this curse of dusty dead existence, they were given a promise. The serpent who eats dust, slithering around this creation seeking to devour man in death, will be crushed; he will be destroyed by a seed of the woman. One of mankind is promised to destroy the serpent's head. Now I ask you, what comes out of the head? Is it not thoughts? Do those thoughts not lead to words? Of course. The Promised Seed will crush the thoughts and words of Satan, while at the same time suffering in the body by being crushed in the heel. It will change the way in which mankind will walk. It will bring to nothing the speed and strength of man in which man uses so constantly to build himself up. Those things will be shown to be vain, and only one thing is full of life.

Enter Jesus, immediately after His baptism, He is cast into the wilderness. He, who is fully God and fully man, lives his life as a man. He is tempted to fear, love, and trust something other than God. He hears the words of the adversary, the sight of the great deceiver, and the temptations of the slanderer. He witnesses the devil smash God's Word into powder and apply it to his face to cover all the blemishes of what it looks like to be human. Instead of tempting man to be like God, Jesus is tempted to not be like man, "You are God, you know that Jesus. Let everyone else know it. You don't need to be hungry. You don't need to live in pain and agony. You don't deserve that; take the glory right now."

But the Promised Seed, for you, needs to be a man. He is tempted in every single way that you are, and did not fall into temptation. He lived perfectly. This was not a vain show. He was truly God and truly man. He lived, suffered, and died not to build Himself up; He did it for you.

Now we come to St. Paul's words. The two verses just before our text read, "*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"<sup>2</sup> Christ is the reconciler. His work is what crushed Satan's head. His Word is the only thing that silences the adversary. He doesn't just break God's Word down to gloss over sin; He correctly applies it for healing. Death is destroyed and life eternal is given. It is in Christ that one is right with God.

So, what does Paul mean when he says we work with Him? Simple. We are right with God; free from His wrath against our sin, free from doubt of salvation, free from the anxiety of just how much of the checklist of good works must I do to have God allow me to get into heaven. Our wages of sin have been paid for in full by the blood of Jesus, true God and true Man, so I am free to live in love towards my neighbor. This is why we hold God's Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. This is why His Name is not taken in vain; He changes our dead, lifeless sinful, rock-hard stubborn hearts and fills them with His own blood, His own life, His own words. Our work is simply living as a redeemed child of God! How great is that! Now is the time of salvation; now is the favorable time. Hear God's Word, receive His gifts.

See what great gifts these are. What do they do? They forgive. They give life in the midst of death. These gifts are for endurance. The life of man is hard, we learn that from Adam. We learn that from Jesus. We know that from experience. This last year highlights many things that have always been there, many things that require quite a bit of endurance. This is not just simple things of enduring the deplorable three hours of sporting events, or the 3 minutes of the microwave for popcorn; we are talking about enduring life with sickness, and unrest, and loneliness, and death.

I'm sure like you, I got tired of hearing about how bad last year was, and how not good this year is shaping up to be, and how God is either absent or non-existent or uncaring. Even worse are the attacks Christians are making on each other. The best construction is far from being put on anything. Defending and speaking well of are almost unheard of, as even Christians are finding it easier to be like God themselves. They are the only arbiters of right and wrong. They are sucked in by the gleaming fruits of self-vanity, and moralistic grandstanding.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

The fear is not in God's wrath against sin. The love is not in Jesus who shed His blood. The trust is not in the Holy Spirit who gives us all things of God.

Jesus knows of this hard and suffering life, and so He gives His gifts for your endurance. Notice that the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians says not just *endurance*, He says *great endurance*. Each of the nine things listed to endure are difficult enough on their own; but notice again that each of these are plurals; this means they are repeated over and over again. Not only are they repeated, but they heap up their repetitions, piling on top of each other in a wicked heap.

Generally speaking, look at the list of things we are to endure, which is precisely why God graciously gives His gifts. Three are abstract, conceptual terms (things that require perseverance—and these are not mere synonyms); these are things that are experienced by mankind in an internal sense. Three are not abstract; but are concrete, very real terms that can be seen on the outside; heavy painful afflictions. The last three contain a great exertion and two deep deprivations. Poured together, these things fill one to the brim, threatening to push one over the edge.

Look at these terms. *Afflictions* is word than means to press. *Necessities* is to force one, compel one against their will. *Calamities*, better translated as *anxieties*, is the effect of afflictions and necessities. The word is derived from the word for narrow, being in a tight place, hemmed in, full of anxiety like claustrophobia and needing to get out where one can again breathe freely.

Next is *beatings*, physical attacks to the body. Worse yet is imprisonments, that is a removal of freedom, degenerated to being regarded as an animal in a cage. Worse yet is *riots*, that is tumults, mob rule. This is followed by *labors*, that is hard, tiring, severe, with nothing being accomplished. These things find what kind of results? Sleeplessness and hunger.

The unrest in our own hearts and minds, poured on by the unrest in the world around us, is a wicked lot. How well has your sleep been this last year? How well have you felt like eating? From the fear of sickness to the body to the riots of last summer to the ongoing civil and political unrest that plagues our country, do you have much of an appetite? Do you find rest?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the very reality and greatness of the gifts of God.

While the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh war and vie for unrest and seek to hem us in by locking us up, pressing us in on every side, Jesus destroys the barriers and gives life. He gives His Holy Spirit, the life-giving breath, in whom we live and move and have our being. He gives us purity. His unchangeable Word, who lived being pressed in on every side, vexed with anxieties that you suffer, bore them for you to the tree of the cross. Where mankind was overcome at the tree by the serpent, Jesus, true man, crushed the serpents head on the tree of the cross.

With that very knowledge, comes life-giving fruit of redemption—patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, by truthful speech. In Christ, you are able to see past the walls pressing in; the world says it's bad; the flesh can't look up, but faith patiently prays, "***I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.***"<sup>3</sup> Look up to the One who was lifted up for all the world to see.

The One who lived perfectly died the innocent death for you, "***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.***"<sup>4</sup> This is not a vain, self-puffed up showing that is useless. This is real. The Son of God took on human flesh. Jesus died on the cross bearing the sin of the world. On the cross, you see your favorable time. The Day of Salvation is here, right now. His death is done and His fruits are poured over you. They are spoken to your hearts, held fast in your minds. They are placed on your tongues and poured into your mouths.

This is the greatness of our God, through this apparent weakness to the world, God shows His greatest love and gifts His greatest gift, to you, His children. It is in this very reality that we are treated as imposters by the world, yet we are true. We hear and live as God designs, as He declares, which is foolishness to the world, but the very wisdom of God. We may be unknown by the world, but we are fully known by God Himself. Every hair on your head is numbered. You are of more value to God than sparrows and the flowers of the field; He took on your form and died to redeem you.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 121:1–2

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21–6:1

The world attempts to cloud us about death and dying. It either seeks to make death pleasing to the eye for our sinful nature, such as harming our neighbor, or killing babies and the infirm, all under a death banner of mercy; or, it attempts to scare us about death—that to die is something that you should be afraid of and avoided at all costs because all that matters is your life, right now, and what you want to do with it. The world applies makeup to death, and it is worse than lipstick on a pig; it does a terrible job.

In Christ, we see death for what it really is. It is the wage of sin. It is something that awaits all who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is something that causes pain and loss and sadness and grief; and it has been defeated. It has been destroyed and driven to the dust. Jesus has died the death of dust for those who are of the dust. He has risen from the dead. All who are in Him now, right now, enjoy the very gifts that He Himself has given to the dust. Death is not something to be feared. God alone is to be feared above death. Death is a sleep. Those who die in the faith, have already died in baptism. They will fall asleep where their body will rest in the ground, and their soul will rest in heaven until the resurrection on the Last Day.

While we may be poor, we possess everything, “***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***”<sup>5</sup> While we may be sorrowful, we rejoice, “***This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.***”<sup>6</sup>

We are not our own vain show, we are God’s treasured possession, “***None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.***”<sup>7</sup>

As His beloved children, we hear God say,  
 “Ever shall Mine eyes behold thee; On My bosom thou art laid.  
 Ever shall My love enfold thee; Never shalt thou lack Mine aid.  
 Neither Satan, war, nor stress Then shall mar thy happiness:  
 With this blessed consolation Be thou firm in tribulation.”<sup>8</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:3

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 118:24

<sup>7</sup> Romans 14:7–8

<sup>8</sup> Zion Mourns in Fear and Anguish TLH 268:5

**Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form**  
**First Sunday in Lent (Invocabit)**  
**21 February 2021**

Almighty God, You led Your ancient people through the desert and brought them to the Promised Land. Guide the people of Your Church, that following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You disdain nothing that You have made. Create in us new and contrite hearts, that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, we would receive Your absolution with true penitence. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, because we are dust, stretch forth the right hand of Your majesty and defend us from those that rise up against Your Church. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, preserve all catechumens and their teachers, all children and their parents, and every Christian home from the assaults of the evil one. As Your Son overcame Satan in the desert by the Word of God, so also give us the victory through Christ and His Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, since we sojourn in the wilderness of this earth, look upon our desire for peace, and by Your mighty power defend us and our nation against all our enemies. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, send Your holy angels to protect and keep us in Your ways, that no evil may befall us. Graciously behold the needy, shut-in, the homebound, the lonely, the despairing, the sick, the recovering, the troubled and all who have requested our prayers [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Jen Zebuhr, Gordon Robbins, Keith Teggatz, Mary Ann Teggatz, and those we name in our hearts.*]. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *April, Markie, Cole, and Dennis*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit he may faithfully keep the covenant into which he has been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Dylan* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You covered the sin and shame of our first parents with animal skin and foreshadowed Your perfect sacrifice in the shedding of Your Son's blood, by which we are cleansed and clothed. Give us the garments of repentance and faith, that we may receive Your Son's body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, inasmuch as the adversary continually afflicts us and as a roaring lion walks about, seeking to devour us: We implore You for the sake of the suffering and death of Your Son, Jesus Christ, to help us by the grace of the Holy Spirit and to strengthen our hearts by Your Word, that our enemy may not prevail over us, but that we may evermore abide in Your grace and be preserved unto everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**