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On this second Sunday in Lent we begin our Collect with, *Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; But then we are met with a curious phrase, Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls...* Why do we pray such a strange sounding phrase? In case we thought that it was to keep us from floating off, *the collect goes on, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault the body and hurt the soul. Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls* is, of course, just an old-fashioned way of saying, defend our bodies and souls from evil. We continue to learn that we are helpless to help ourselves. Perhaps, the recent winter storm has helped remind us of this fact. Regardless of how advanced we become as a civilization, regardless of medical and scientific breakthroughs, we cannot help ourselves or defend ourselves from temptation. We need God's help; only God can keep us from evil and harm, and only God can keep us from the damage we inflict on ourselves.

The pragmatist may ask, what does to *keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls* look like? We see examples in the Epistle and Gospel this morning, but we find another example in The Screwtape Letters. In Chapter 13, the lesser demon writes to the greater demon for advice. He has a "patient" who is the poor man this demon has been assigned to, and the "patient" is surrounded by an asphyxiating cloud which is impenetrable to the demon's attempts to tempt and lead him into evil. Screwtape writes, *A repentance and renewal of what the other side call "grace" on the scale which you describe is a defeat of the first order...As you ought to have known, the asphyxiating cloud which prevented your attacking the patient on his walk back from the old mill is a well-known phenomenon. It is [God's] most barbarous weapon, and generally appears when He is directly present to the patient under certain modes not yet fully classified. Some humans are permanently surrounded by it, and therefore inaccessible to us.* We pray this morning to be among that number who are permanently surrounded by a cloud of grace, and that we be kept free from the temptations and assaults which would hurt our bodies and our souls.

We see the power of Jesus Christ to accomplish this prayer in this morning's Gospel. A Gentile mother seeks the healing of her daughter, a little girl who is *grievously vexed with a devil*. We might be made more uncomfortable though by thinking that Jesus refers to this poor woman as a "dog." But it is not that at all, Jesus tests her faith to reveal the extent to which her faith, humility, and courage are genuine. Yet one *grievously vexed with a devil*, unable to help or defend herself,

is delivered by the mere will of Jesus Christ who just last week we learned was Himself tempted in the wilderness by Satan. Jesus does not even have to go to the woman's house and lay hands over the poor daughter, but simply says, *great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt*. The Gospel records that the daughter *was made whole from that very hour*, her mother's prayer answered.

We saw in the Gospel that neither the young girl nor her mother were able to help their situation and that the answer they sought came only from Christ. And, so, we find ourselves in the beginning of Lent praying *Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves....* But there is more. We must cooperate with God's Grace for His power to have its effect in our lives. We have the opportunity to pray this prayer this Lent, to pray that we be surrounded by a cloud of grace that asphyxiates the demons, and when this happens, our faults, things we must work on with God, will be revealed to us by God's grace. God's grace can and will defend us from the temptations and evil thoughts that assault and hurt the body and the soul. Not only do we ask for God's continual keeping because we do not know the temptations each day and hour may produce, but we also ask God to reveal what secret or blatant sins we must give up.

This is why St. Paul explains in the Epistle how we are to please God, to abstain from fornication and lust, from the lust of the flesh, and lust for the world and all created goods. We are reminded to avoid the occasions that give rise to sin. We must pray that God will give us the courage to avoid the old habits that normally tempt us. We pray that we will participate in the life of Christ who withstood every temptation. This requires grace and wisdom; it requires repentance and renewal. This is what the forty days of Lent is all about, *we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves*. We need God to keep us from the dangers that will come against our bodies and souls, but we also need to take baby steps towards repentance and renewal. We must cooperate with God's grace.

We know we cannot keep Lent perfectly; we know that what we try to give up or take on this Lent cannot save us. This Lent let us offer our fast to God, recognizing that *we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves*, but that still God will bless our endeavors this Lent and grant us the repentance and renewal that we long for. Our Lenten task is clear, to cast out unchastity, and all excessive desire for this world's goods, by the discipline of prayer, fasting, and alms-giving. Let us approach this task with the same humility, faith and perseverance the Canaanite woman displayed in today's Gospel. We must know ourselves well, trust fully that God will perform his promises, and persist even when God seems to resist our urgent requests. Then God will answer our prayers and defend us from all

adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul.