PRAY THE PSALM OF THE WEEK Psalm 130:4-5, 1-2, 7-8
If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.
Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord:
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy,
With Him is abundant redemption, and He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

BLESS YOURSELF WITH THE HOLY CROSS AND SAY:
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

SAy THE APOSTLES’ CREED
I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAY THE PRAYER OF THE WEEK
O God, our Refuge and Strength, the Author of all godliness, be ready, we implore You, to hear the devout prayers of Your Church, especially in times of persecution, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually: through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

PRAY THE MORNING OR EVENING PRAYER
Morning. I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger: and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Evening. I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.
**THEME OF THE WEEK: Resisting the Unforgiving Flesh**

Holding a grudge against your brother or sister in the faith seems like such a small thing: “a little anger here and there certainly isn’t such a bad thing,” we subconsciously think. And yet that anger grieves the Holy Spirit and denies the partnership we have with our fellow believers in the gospel. God is faithful in both His blessing and His curse; let us then forgive from the heart as Christ calls us to do, for we have been forgiven in Christ. From that overflowing fountain of forgiveness, Christ works a good work in us, bringing it to completion on the last day when we will join with all the choirs of heaven singing God’s praise.

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:23-35 — Forgiven from the Heart

“It’s just a little grudge. I’m sure I’ll get over it eventually,” you say to yourself. “He really deserves my frustration anyway.” Jesus speaks differently. You must forgive your brother from your heart. It’s not an optional activity for the Christian. The final words Christ uses to conclude the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew chapter six do not speak about the kingdom or daily bread, but rather forgiveness: “If you do not forgive others . . . neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.” The sinful flesh clings to the sins of others, even while the new man cries out for the strength to forgive. Only in the forgiveness you have received can you also forgive others. Forgiving Father, purge my sinful flesh that I might gladly forgive those who sin against me. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 119:169-176 — The Cry of the New Adam

The old flesh clings to the sins of the neighbor. The new man created in Christ Jesus calls out to God for renewal and strength: it fights against the unforgiving flesh. Rather than lips pouring forth vitriol and anger against the neighbor, the new man pours forth praise to God. His tongue sings of God’s Word and regularly reads and recites the Word of God. The new man admits that at times, the unforgiving flesh has led him astray, and then the new man cries out to God, “seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.” Heavenly Father, create in me a clean heart, that I might not cling to the sins of my neighbor but gladly received understanding from Your Word and thereby forgive those who sin against me. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:** Philippians 1:3-11 — Partnership in the Gospel

Chris fights the unforgiving flesh because He shares in a partnership with His fellow members of Christ’s body. This partnership includes a common goal—the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to the nations. It also includes the unity given only in the forgiving work of Christ. This partnership drives Christians to love more and more, first the fellow Christian and also those who do not yet belong to Christ’s kingdom. Thus, the Christian gladly forgives, for Christ who forgives the Christian will complete the work of forgiveness by working in the Christian to forgive those around him. Father, thank You for the forgiveness You gave me in Jesus Christ, and bring to completion this work in me and help me to forgive those who sin against me. Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 7:9-11 — God is Faithful

God blesses and curses. The curse demands that God punish all who hate Him. Those who refuse to forgive their brother declare their hatred of God. You cannot love God and hate your brother. God threatens to curse those who reject His forgiveness by rejecting their brother. God also blesses. His steadfast love and forgiveness is for those who love Him and keep His commandments—to thousands of generations! Christians crucify the sinful flesh and forgive those who sin against them. Faithful God, forgive us for failing to forgive our brothers and sisters, and remain with us in Your steadfast love. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 18:1-20 — Gaining the Brother

Matthew 18 lays out how Christian brothers should approach each other when one has sinned against another. It’s instructive to note the purpose of this procedure—to gain the brother. How often have we approached a fellow brother or sister in Christ—according to Matthew 18—intent to show the brother what he’s done wrong and set him straight. But we should approach the brother with the intent to “gain” him back. The unforgiving flesh uses Matthew 18 to humiliate the brother into repentance: the forgiving flesh uses Matthew 18 to gain the brother in repentance. The intent is never to alienate, but always to win him back to faith. Dear Jesus, grant us repentant hearts that we might warn and win our fallen brethren in love for You. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:** Ephesians 4:30-32 — Grieving the Holy Spirit

The little grudges we hold—they can’t be all that bad, can they? St. Paul warns us not to grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. What grieves the Holy Spirit? Bitterness. Wrath. Anger. Clamor. Slander. Malice. When your unforgiving flesh clings to bitterness and anger, wrath and malice against your fellow Christians, it grieves the Holy Spirit. He has called His people to kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness—as we have been forgiven in Christ. And thank the Lord for that. For only from the forgiveness we receive can we forgive those who sin against us. Holy Spirit, by the gifts of Word and Sacrament, keep me tenderhearted and kind, quick to forgive as I have been forgiven in Christ. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 31 — The Lord is My Rock and Fortress

The unforgiving flesh often clings to the sins of others for revenge. But revenge belongs to the Lord, and nowhere better than the Psalms does the Christian learn to leave revenge to God. The Psalms do not hesitate to declare punishment upon the wicked for their sins, but that punishment always belongs to God. Always do the Psalms call on the Lord to punish the wicked, while at the same time clinging to the steadfast love of God who preserves His faithful. He repays the one who acts in pride; but the faithful humbly waits on the Lord. He hides the one who takes refuge in him. Father, be a rock of refuge and a fortress of strength for me, that my unforgiving flesh might be put to death, and I learn to gladly forgive as I have been forgiven. Amen.