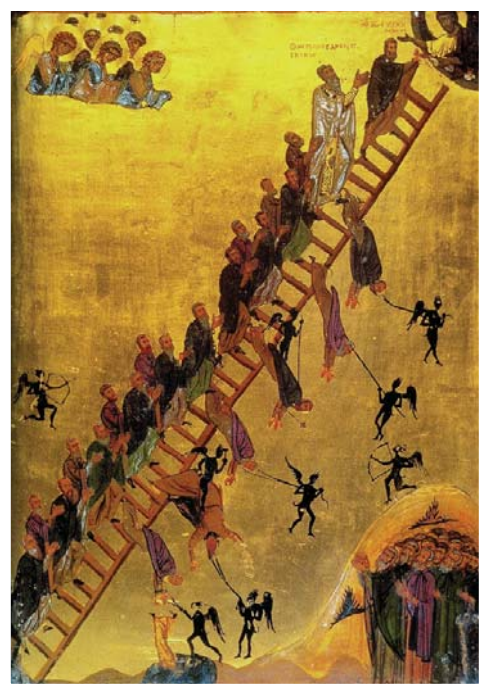


Two perennial questions that people have asked since the dawn of human history are, “Why is their evil in the world” and “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Humanly speaking no adequate answer exists for those questions but our faith gives us the answer. In the Book of Wisdom we read: *“But through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it”* (Wis. 2:24). Many of the things that we associate with causing evil such as poverty or lack of education are in reality secondary causes. The first and primary cause is our most ancient foe: the devil. The season of Lent, which for us should be a time of spiritual combat, gives us an opportunity to strengthen ourselves against his efforts to steal our souls.

First, it is an article of our faith that the devil exists and that he, along with his minions, is active in the world. We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called “Satan” or the “devil.” The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God; “The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by

God, but they became evil by their own doing” (CCC 391).

It needs to be stated that belief in the devil and his working to tempt us into eternal damnation is at an all time low in both society and in the Church. The formerly Christian West scoffs at it as a medieval superstition from which “modern man (supposedly) come of age” has been freed. As regards the Church, the priest author of this article can attest that during his four years of theological studies he didn’t hear a single word on the devil. Some modern scripture “scholars” will state that the Gospel accounts of our Lord casting out devils weren’t really that. Recently, one very high ranking prelate said that these exorcisms didn’t take place but that Jesus was acting in a “therapeutic manner” to a troubled person. Supposedly the modern science of psychology and our increased medical knowledge show that these stories involved people with either severe mental disorders or a medical condition like epilepsy which the evangelists didn’t know about. When you hear that, remember the event of our Lord expelling the demon known as “Legion” from the Gerasene demoniac (Gospel of Mark chapter 5). You can’t send a mental illness or a medical condition from a man



The Ladder of Divine Ascent
— Monastery of St Catherine of Siena (12th Century)

“BE SOBER, BE WATCHFUL”

“Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.” 1 Peter 5: 8

“For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness on high.”

Ephesians 6: 12

disorders or a medical condition like epilepsy which the evangelists didn’t know about. When you hear that, remember the event of our Lord expelling the demon known as “Legion” from the Gerasene demoniac (Gospel of Mark chapter 5). You can’t send a mental illness or a medical condition from a man

into a herd of two thousand pigs. It would also be like saying that our Lord didn't know what He was doing, an implicit denial of His divinity. So the devil exists and he's quite active in getting us to sin and thereby cause evil. Dr. Maria-Anca Cernea, president of the Association of Catholic Doctors of Bucharest, Romania, eloquently stated this at the recent Synod of Bishops on the family: *"The Church's mission is to save souls. Evil, in this world, comes from sin. Not from income disparity or 'climate change.' The solution is: Evangelization. Conversion. Not an ever-increasing government control. Not a world government."* Evangelization, conversion: just what Lent is about.

If you are able to listen to the talks of the Servant of God, Fr. John Hardon, SJ, you will notice that no matter what subject he is speaking about, he will always include two observations: the Catholic Church is currently undergoing her greatest crisis in her two thousand year history and the devil has never been more successful in influencing society and has deeply penetrated the Church. How does the devil accomplish this? By getting us to believe that evil is good and good evil. Almighty God said through the prophet Isaiah, *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness."* (Is. 5: 20) You see this most especially in the legalization of abortion and the drive to normalize the same-sex attraction.

While the above may sound as doom and gloom, nevertheless we are not meant to simply be punching bags absorbing the devil's blows. We can hit back. First we must acknowledge what Catholic apologist Paul Thigpen says in his "Manual for Spiritual Warfare", *"Like it or not, you are at war. No matter who you are — whether or not you know it — you have a mortal enemy who wants to destroy you, not just in this life, but in the next. No matter where you live on this planet — whether or not you can see it — you live on a hotly contested battlefield, and you can't escape the conflict. It is a spiritual war with crucial consequences in your everyday life. And the outcome of that war will determine your eternal destiny."* Christianity has been a militant religion since the beginning, but not in

the sense in which Islam calls for a holy war against infidels, promising paradise to those who fall in battle. Instead the Christian warfare is of a moral and spiritual character, but in no way less demanding or important.

We begin our participation in this spiritual warfare by remembering that the victory of Christ over Satan is the very heart of the Gospel. After the sin of our first parents, humanity fell under the power of the evil one, who became the prince of darkness. Christ enters into the house of the powerful and binds him, in order to take back that which is His (Mt. 12:29). With His death on the cross, Christ obtains the definitive victory over the power of darkness (CCC 1708).

Though we are weak creatures, God cares for us as His children. As Scripture says, *"God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it"* (1 Cor. 10: 13). God permits us to be tempted to test our obedience and freely choose His will. In the Gospel of Luke, just before His passion, Jesus said to St. Peter: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might shift you like wheat"* (Lk. 23: 31). "Demanded" implies that the temptation must be allowed by God. Not to affirm this doctrine would mean that we are in the hands of blind destiny, and anyone could be tempted with a power and intensity beyond his strength to resist. Therefore, the message is clear and comforting: God, as our Father, watches out so that none of His children are pressured beyond what they are capable of. He gives each the grace to be strong in the face of temptation and choose good instead of evil.

When we are tempted we must immediately resist it with the help of God's grace. A temptation is harmless if we resist and do not entertain it. From the moment we begin to dialogue with a particular temptation, though, considering the pros and cons of what it offers, our opposition to it begins to weaken, and it is far more difficult to resist succumbing to it.

As St. Paul tells us, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the*

devil" (Eph. 6:11), we have some excellent weapons at our disposal to assist us. So, a few suggestions which come from the saints and priests involved in the ministry of exorcism. A strong sacramental life is the *sine qua non* of resisting the devil. Frequent Mass and Confession give us that armor. The same goes with prayer. An excellent practice is to daily renew one's baptismal promises. The priests who conduct exorcisms tell us that the devil hates holy water. Attach a holy water font near your main door so that when you enter or leave your home you bless yourself with the sign of the cross and holy water. The use of sacramentals constitutes another part of the armor. Particularly effective are the St. Benedict's jubilee medal (the most indulgenced medal in the Church) and the Miraculous medal. Remember, these are not good luck charms. They must be worn in conjunction with

a devout spiritual life. And lastly, for the ambitious who really want to take it to the devil on his own turf, there is an association known as "Association of Auxilium Christianorum" which is a church approved body established by exorcists seeking a support group of lay faithful to assist their apostolate through prayer. Members pledge to say certain daily prayers, along with the daily Rosary and frequent reception of the sacraments. You can find them at <http://www.auxiliumchristianorum.org>.

When exorcisms are done there is always a prayer team assisting the priest-exorcist. In this way you can do a lot to save souls imperiled by the devil.

So a blessed combat during Lent. A last word from our Blessed Savior: "*He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" ✠