

Sin and Satan: the Opposite and Enemy of Love

Now if love is the essence of our Christian life, and if our goal is to grow in this love for God and neighbor so as to someday be perfectly united to God in heaven, we need to know what is the biggest obstacle to that love. You all know what that obstacle is: sin; or more precisely, sin and the devil. Many don't like to talk about such things anymore. They want to make it a thing of the past. "Oh, that's what the sisters used to teach about in the old days; we don't believe that anymore." We sure do.

The fact is that there is a war raging right this very moment. It's far bloodier than any war in history. The enemy, ruthless beyond imagining, and it's led by a commander more skillful than Caesar, Attila the Hun and Patton put together. We are standing in the midst of the battlefield, and the stakes are high—because the fight is over your immortal soul. The enemy is Satan and his legion of demons, numbering in the millions, maybe even billions (Padre Pio once said that there are so many demons in the world that, if they were given physical bodies, they would block out the entire sun!); and these demons will stop at nothing, nothing, in order to drag us down to hell, or better in order to get us to throw ourselves into hell.

Those among us today who have served in the military will surely tell us that one of the most basic tactics in war is to learn about your enemy: how he attacks, how he retreats, etc. And the more one knows ahead of time, the better prepared he is to fight and the greater his chances for victory. And so, it's fitting that from time to time we review the devil's tactics lest we forget and lose our soul.

The first thing that we must do in order to defeat the devil and shun all his snares is simply to recognize that he really does exist, he and all his demon followers. They are spirits, fallen angels, who have been condemned to everlasting punishment in hell but are

allowed to roam about this world for a time, tempting man. It's strange that today, when the presence of evil and sin is so widespread, so many want to deny this simple truth—a truth to which Sacred Scripture attests many times. In fact, the devil is mentioned 32 times in the New Testament; demons are mentioned 77 times in the New Testament and 12 in the Old; Satan is mentioned by name 14 times in the Old Testament and 32 in the New. These are not just expressions used to signify some kind of abstract evil presence; they are real creatures, creatures who hate mankind and will stop at nothing to lead us into sin. If you want to be defeated by the devil, just deny his existence; that's exactly what he wants—a criminal works best when his victims deny his very presence, and the devil works best amidst the darkness of ignorance, because then he can appear as an angel of light. It is this fact which led Fr. Gabriel Amorth, the chief exorcist of Rome, to write his book called *An Exorcist Tells His Story*.

Having performed literally thousands of exorcisms, Fr. Amorth is convinced that one of the gravest evils of our day is the complete denial of the existence of the devil—even by Catholics, and, may God have mercy, even by priests and bishops. And so, the first step in defeating the devil is recognizing that this “father of lies” really does exist and is alive and active in our world.

Having exposed the devil, the next thing we must do is learn his method of attack and how to resist. We must remember that Satan and all the devils are far stronger, faster, more intelligent, more powerful in every way on the natural level than we can ever be. On our own without the help of God we are destined for defeat. It's as simple as that. Only a fool would try to fight an entire army on his own; only a fool would think that he does not need God's constant help and protection from the devil. So a humble submission to God and constant recourse to Him in prayer is necessary.

Now, the devil is too smart to start with an all-out open attack. Instead, he starts his attack slowly, with something small: a little gossip, a quick glance at something impure, a little lie, skipping our daily prayers. Think about how he attacked Adam and Eve: he just simply raised some doubts in Eve's mind, "Did God *really* say not to eat of the tree?" At that moment Eve ought to have fled, but instead she dialogued with the him. She began to doubt God's words—the beginning of her fall. How often we hear, "After all, it's only a venial sin. It's not that bad." Or, "Well, I accept most of the Church's teachings, but not all of them." But every sin and every disbelief of even the smallest of the Church's teachings is an offense against God, a tiny victory for the devil. And you can be sure that he who does not mind falling into venial sins will soon be committing ones which are mortal; and he who rejects some of the Church's teachings will soon reject them all. As C. S. Lewis once said, *Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.* To lead a good life you must resist temptation right from the very beginning; do not give the devil even an inch, or he will take all, even your soul.

Next, as our Blessed Lord teaches in the Gospels, we must never tempt God: *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.* This is a grave warning to those who are inclined to think, "It doesn't matter what kind of life I lead; I'll just make sure I go to Confession right before I die." As if they can demand God's mercy whenever they want! Our good God, in fact, gives us plenty of chances to repent, plenty of opportunities for forgiveness...and yet the lines at the confessionals are always so small. By tempting God you are falling into the devil's snares in the worst way: you are imitating him.

Another way we open the door to Satan is by keeping hatred and rancor in our hearts—holding grudges, not forgiving offenses. Fr. Gabriel Amorth stated that one of the chief

causes of demonic possession is a hateful and unforgiving heart. Remember, where there is no charity there is no Christ; and where there is no Christ the devil reigns supreme. Now only a traitor lets the enemy into his own camp. Remember, don't open the door even a little to the enemy.

So what do you do if the devil gets in, if you are face to face with him, so to speak, if the temptation to sin is right at your doorstep? *Resist the devil*, says Scripture, *and he will take flight*. Prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments and fasting. No one can resist temptation, whether it come from the devil or from ourselves, without these wonderful aids. Knowing man's weakness and the devil's power, God has granted us so many helps to our salvation; we would be absolute fools not to make frequent use of them. *These can only be cast out by prayer and fasting*, Christ said. The chief exorcist of Rome, again, makes the profound observation that the sacrament of Confession is even more powerful than an exorcism, and that those in the state of mortal sin are worse off than those who suffer demonic possession; for, the possessed are not responsible for their actions, whereas those in the state of mortal sin are. Call on God for help and make ample use of the many means He has given us. Holy water, sacramentals like the Rosary and the scapular and sacred images, daily prayer, fasting. All these things really do work; that's why God gave them to us. If we really knew how well-armed is the soul who prays, is in the state of grace and uses sacramentals and the sacraments, we would never neglect these holy weapons.

Finally, rule number four: never give up the fight. Holy Job said that the *life of man upon earth is a constant warfare*. Until we leave this world we will be engaged in a battle which has already been won by the Blood of Christ. We just need to stay close to our Lord and our Lady and keep fighting. Be calm and trust in God's love for you and His infinite power. He is a King Who will never abandon His troops.