

October 28, 2022

## A SERIES ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

### The fight against the devil

#### (Part II)

*"Keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand up to him, strong in faith" (1Pe 5:8-9).*

The comparison with a roaring lion makes it clear that, in spiritual combat, we face a terrible enemy. He is ready for anything and stalks his victim carefully and aggressively. To make matters worse, this opponent does not abide by the "rules of chivalry" at all. He knows no compassion and will never be lenient with his victim. The Devil is evil to the core! His intentions are destruction and the conquest of power for himself. In order to reach his goal, he makes use of any means at his disposal. If it were possible, he would exercise his despotic dominion over the whole earth without limit... But a stronger one came and bound him (cf. Mk 3:27).

How could God have permitted the existence of such an evil being, who now, full of hatred, pursues humankind everywhere?

In reality, the Devil had been created as a magnificent angel who, like all the other angels, was at the service of God. The Lord had endowed all His rational creatures with a free will, for His glory was to be reflected in them. God wanted true love to reign between Him and His creatures. And for this love to be true, it had to be free. However, the freedom that God gives can also be abused, and this is precisely what the Devil did! Instead of serving God, he wanted to reign himself, so he rebelled against God. He and the other rebellious angels irrevocably rejected God and His Kingdom. Now, moved by hatred, the Devil acts on Earth, fighting against God and His Son Jesus. He tries to cause terrible spiritual and even physical harm to people and society. Although the Devil is powerful, because he is pure spirit, he is not omnipotent, because he is a creature.

God allows the Devil to act and even includes him in His plan of salvation. Something similar happens with sin: man sins because he abuses his freedom, but God knows how

to insert this evil in His plan of salvation, in spite of all its destructive force. We are often unaware of the exact way in which he does this, but faith assures us of this truth.

We have been enlisted in this combat and sometimes we are directly confronted with the Devil. He wants to rob us of the grace of divine sonship and involve us in his rebellion against God.

Without God's aid, we would be helpless, at the mercy of the Devil's power; however, we can overcome him if the Holy Spirit is at work in us. Jesus has broken the dominion of Satan and we have a part in this victory, which is to be extended over the whole earth and actualized in every soul. We can express it in these terms: The Lord conquers in us and with us over the power of evil.

The Devil tries to ally himself with the other two enemies of which we have spoken in previous meditations (the world apart from God and the flesh, that is, our disordered inclination to evil as a consequence of original sin). But he also attacks man directly, especially through evil thoughts and feelings. His intentions are always the same, whether he attacks us directly or indirectly: he wants to induce us to sin; or, if it is someone who is already struggling for holiness, he will at least try to put obstacles in their way.

When God permits something, He does so in his infinite wisdom, even if it is painful for us to bear.

Since this is a spiritual combat, we must also confront this enemy in a spiritual way. For this, chapter 6 of the letter to the Ephesians gives us excellent advice:

*"Finally, grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of His power.*

*Put on the full armour of God so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the principalities and the ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil in the heavens. That is why you must take up all God's armour, or you will not be able to put up any resistance on the evil day, or stand your ground even though you exert yourselves to the full. So stand your ground, with the belt of truth round your waist, and breastplate of righteousness in place, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to quench the burning arrows of the Evil One. And*

*then you must take salvation as your helmet and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the word of God. In all your prayer and entreaty keep praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people" (Eph 6:10-18).*

It will be very important that we consciously accept the challenge to fight against the Devil (as well as the fight against the world and the flesh)! This does not mean, by any means, that we should pay much attention to the devil. It is enough to know of his existence, to identify his purposes and to know how to defend ourselves against his cunning attacks.

If we take this combat seriously, it will bring us closer and closer to God, for with our own strength we could not offer resistance to this enemy. But if we clothe ourselves with the armor described by St. Paul, it will, on the one hand, increase our vigilance and, on the other hand, we will become more rooted in faith.

"Girding ourselves with the truth" means living according to God's Will, following His Son and being sincere with ourselves and with others; that is, living in authentic righteousness. The darts of the Evil One will hardly be able to pierce this armor!

"Feet fitted with zeal for the Gospel" implies that the Devil will also lose ground when we fight for evangelization, when other people find faith moved by our witness. The "shield of faith" -that is, clinging to God and to all that He has revealed to us as truth- will protect us from evil thoughts, which are like poisoned arrows.

When we arm ourselves with the Word of God, which is the "sword of the Spirit" that separates truth from falsehood, and is itself the light in the dark paths we traverse, the evil of the fallen angels must give way.

All this gives us an idea of the way in which God uses the wickedness of our enemy for the good of His faithful. We are called to resist and thus be strengthened in faith. Moreover, the Lord overcomes the power of evil on earth through His own, for His Kingdom is to be extended and the Devil hinders this expansion. We then have the "honor" of fighting in God's army as soldiers of the light, to put it in terms of warfare applied to the spiritual dimension. On our side are the angels who remained faithful, the saints in heaven and even the army of the blessed souls in purgatory. They will all intercede for us!

Let us live our faith consciously and grow each day in love, fulfilling what God asks of us and uniting our sufferings to those of Christ. Let us get up after every defeat, trusting in God's mercy. Thus, with His grace, we will be able to emerge victorious in this combat.

God is with us at all times and always comes to our aid. But He also wants us to do our part, to show Him our love and our faithfulness.