The Marist Way of Fighting the Battles of the Lord Under the Banner of Mary - Part 6

"Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the Devil. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

Ephesians 6:10-11, 14-17

God had assigned a unique role for Mary to play in the history of salvation, beginning with the Book of Genesis. After the fall of Adam and Eve, God speaks to the serpent directly. "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you will [only] strike at their heel." (Gen 3: 15) The snake is identified with the Devil (Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9; 20:2). His eventual defeat seemed implied in 1 Jn 3:8, where it is written, "the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the Devil."[1]

The Catholic Church understands Genesis 3:15 to be the first promise of a redeemer for fallen humanity. Several Church Fathers interpreted the verse to refer to Christ and cited Gal. 3:19. and 4:4 to support their position. "She" could refer to Eve but also to Mary, the mother of the Messiah. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, made this connection. In Christian art, Mary is often pictured with her foot on the head of the serpent.[2]

The reference to "enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers" can refer to Eve, all her descendants, and Mary, the new Eve who gave birth to Christ in his physical body and now in his Mystical Body, the Church. She became the mother of the Church when Jesus said to her and the beloved disciple John, "'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From then on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:26-27)

We know how mothers become a force to be reckoned with when their children are in danger. So it is when the Church is threatened. When Jean-Claude Courveille received the inspiration for the Society of Mary, he "heard" Mary say to him with his heart, "I was the mainstay of the new-born Church; I shall be again at the end of time."[3] Recalling the threats to the Church I referenced in *Part 2*, the creation of the Society of Mary is meant to be an "appearance" of Mary in these troubled times. Like the early Church, the present-day Church is especially vulnerable to attacks from within and without, from friend and foe, and especially from the Devil, who appears to be doubling down on his efforts to destroy the Church. Into

[1] https://bible.usccb.org/bible/genesis/3
[2] Ibid.
[3] https://www.acertainway.info/book/chaptertwo/somethingnewforourtimes.pdf.

the fray comes Mary to protect her offspring (the Church) from the snares of the Devil with the fierceness of a mother who does not know the meaning of the word surrender when it comes to facing off with humanity's longtime threat and nemesis, Satan, and his minions.

In the movie *The Passion of the Christ,* there is a scene where Mary's defiance is on display. Jesus is struggling as he makes his way to the cross. Mary follows her son and walks on one side of the narrow street. On the other side and across from her is Satan, who is carrying a hideous-looking infant intended to mock the Incarnation. Mary's gaze locks onto Satan's, and it is a standoff. There is no fear in her eyes, no backing down. Instead, she radiates strength, determination, and utter confidence that Satan's days are numbered. Let me put it this way, when the chips are down, you want her on your side.

And she is. Exorcists report the one person who strikes terror in the hearts of demons, after Christ, is Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Fr. Ripperger says that about 80-85% of the time, when the Devil is about to be expelled, her presence is felt by the exorcist but seen by the Devil. The demons are so frightened by Mary that they cannot even say her name, preferring to describe her as "that woman in blue."[4] She does not say a word, but the demons understand that it is game over. The demons leave, literally kicking and screaming. They are like all bullies who cave in when they meet their match.[5]

Exorcists are quick to emphasize that the power of Christ drives out the Devil. Mary, too, is exercising Christ's power that he has delegated to her to have complete authority over the demons. Their quick exit when she appears on the scene is because they must obey her commands. Compare her interaction with the Devil with that of Eve in the Garden of Eden and see the difference. That is why the Church refers to Mary as the new Eve.

This enmity between Mary and the Devil is reflected in how the Society of Mary understands itself. In the 1872 Constitutions written by Fr. Colin, he writes, "This very name [Society of Mary] sufficiently indicates the banner under which it desires to serve in fighting the battles of the Lord, and what its spirit should be." (1872 Constitutions Article 1, #1.) These battles can refer to the Marists fighting the powers and principalities of the world, such as

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[4] St. Alphonsus Liguori says, "The Devils tremble at the mere mention of Mary's name, and just as men fall to the ground when a bolt of lightning strikes near them, so the Devils quake when they hear Mary's name." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, https://www.magisterium.com/search/3012ea4f-edb4-41c9-b6b9-84d93f41f73d?page=documents&document=f2c979a8-871d-4f46-a059-320d3b837a76&ref=St.%20Alphonsus%20Liguori.

[5] Podcast, *The Devil in the Modern World, Fr. Carlos Martin,* 35:52, "Here's my test to see if this individual demon is now gone. I say to the victim, recite the Hail Mary right now. If the victim can recite the Hail Mary, that demon is gone, because there is no way the devil would put up with that. There's just no way that he would. The devil fears God. He absolutely hates Mary. They will fake saying the Our Father. So, I don't use the Our Father. I want you to say the Hail Mary." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvPMVzsXqgo&t=6s.

injustice, ignorance, faithlessness, etc., that seem to have a power of their own. Behind those powers is the one power that rules them all and seeks the ruination of humanity: the Devil.

This aligns with the thinking of Jean-Claude Colin, who foresaw Marist martyrs not so much in the context of a dangerous mission but in the course of the struggle against the Anti-Christ and, I would add, the various anti-Christs, with a small "a," that appear throughout history.[6] Marist historian Justin Taylor, SM, quotes Colin as having said, "I have always had this thought that the Society is destined to do battle until the end of time."[7] We should not be surprised that the enmity between Mary and the Devil should be reflected in the consciousness of the Society of Mary that is called to be the presence of Mary in the Church and to carry on her work, which includes fighting the battles of the Lord as understood above.

The Church fights these battles knowing that the war has been won. Fighting the battles of the Lord (mop-up operations) refers to the Devil whose stranglehold on humanity was broken, in principle, by Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. The full ramifications of that defeat will take time to be realized. That will happen when Jesus comes again in glory. Until then, the Church forms a resistance movement that is on the march, serving eviction notices to the Devil where and when possible, confident that not even the gates of hell shall prevail against her.

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[6] The Anti-Christ appears in the letters of St. John and is alluded to in the Book of Revelation. He makes a distinction between the many anti-Christs that will appear from time-to-time and *the* Anti-Christ who will come at the end of time. In the 19th century, Europe was undergoing tremendous change known as the Enlightenment. Those living through that change realized the world as they knew it was ending. In reality, it marked the end of one epoch and the beginning of a new one called modernity.

We are living in similar times. As was the case in Fr. Colin's time, there is an increase in speculation about the end of the world and the imminent appearance of the Anti-Christ. I read where the CIA supposedly knows exactly when the world will an end. I would not bet the house on that! To Fr. Colin, this new age seemed like the end times. It was the end of a particular time in history and the beginning of a new one, also called the post-Christian era. Christ loves this particular time as he did those that came before. In fact, he loves this age so much that he sent his mother to be with the Church during the tribulations that are particular to this era. She is to be the face of the Church, not turned in on itself but looking outward to this age of increasing unbelief but with the maternal eyes of the Mother of God. Remember, mothers correct and she intends to correct the spirit of this age by replacing it with her own.

For more about the spirit of this age, go to *The Marist Way of Responding to Secularism* at https://www.marist.com/about/society-of-mary/rector-of-marist-school.

Her appearances and the many Marian congregations that sprung up in response to the Enlightenment does mark an end; meaning, the next and last to intervene will be Christ when he comes again in power and majesty. Fr. Colin thought it could be sooner rather than later but that was his opinion. We ought to follow his lead and get busy doing the work of Mary. "Time is a-wasting!"

For more about the work of Mary, go to *The Essence of Marist Spirituality* at https://www.marist.com/about/society-of-mary/rector-of-marist-school.

[7] Taylor, SM, Justin, Jean-Claude Colin: Reluctant Founder 1790-1875, pp 170-171.

Marists do this in the spirit of Mary, remembering there is no fear in her eyes, no backing down. Instead, she radiates strength, determination, and utter confidence that Satan's days are numbered. That is how we who bear her name, Marist, are to carry ourselves into battle to overthrow the kingdom of Satan and replace it with the Reign of God whenever the opportunity presents itself. Knowing that the war has been won emboldens Christians to fight the battles of the Lord with renewed energy, hope and confidence, assured that ultimate victory is never in doubt. It is easier to engage in those battles knowing you are on the winning side!

That battle begins in our hearts and minds. It also extends outward and includes confronting demonic forces that seek to possess or influence governments, institutions, corporations, etc., by setting priorities and enabling policies and legislation that oppose the values of Reign of God. Examples of this in our nation would be legislation that limits the right to life or protects institutional racism. There are certainly other examples. The Church engages the Devil on those battlegrounds with its teachings on social justice.

In the seventh reflection, I will offer thoughts on what it looks like to fight the battles of the Lord under the banner of Mary.