The Marist Way of Fighting the Battles of the Lord Under the Banner of Mary – Part 2

"Anyone who does not believe in the Devil does not believe in the Gospel." Pope St. John Paul II

Many are familiar with the dramatic and sensational demonstrations associated with demonic possession, infestations, obsession, and vexation as portrayed in the 1973 movie *The Exorcist*.[1] Experienced exorcists who have seen such demonstrations grow tired of the "same old same old." For the seasoned exorcist, that behavior's shock and awe component loses its luster. In actuality, the demonic prefers to be "hidden and unknown in the world"[2] to more effectively influence and cause our downfall by using methods that are so subtle we are unaware of the threat.

Peter was a victim of the Devil's sinister ways when he strongly disagreed with Jesus' announcement that he would go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise on the third day. You will recall that Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan." All of us can become unwitting accomplices to and victims of darker forces seeking our destruction and doing their bidding. Forewarned is to be forearmed, which is the purpose of these reflections.

Finally, I will conclude by reflecting on the role of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whom the Catholic Church believes the Book of Genesis foretells will crush the head of the serpent, and Fr. Colin's understanding of the Society of Mary's role in this epic battle.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that some may have reservations reading about this topic. They may fear that any talk about the demonic will diminish our human responsibility by blaming the Devil for the evil we human beings do and encouraging people to see the Devil behind everything that is wrong.[3]

I need to point out that the sources of temptation are three-fold: the world, the individual, and the Devil. The world can be a source of moral, philosophical, and religious errors through bad examples and ideas contrary to the teachings of the Church as they pertain to faith and morals. The second source of temptation is a person's weaknesses ('homegrown' temptations) that give rise to sin. That would include wrong thinking, such as when we use our reason and come to conclusions contrary to the faith or

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[1]For a more thorough treatment of these, go to *Vexation, Obsession, & Possession: The Extraordinary Ways the Devil Attacks* by Fr. Paolo Carlin at https://catholicexchange.com/vexation-obsession-possession-the-extraordinary-ways-the-Devil-attacks/.

[2] I find it interesting that when we Marists talk about being "as if hidden and unknown in the world" many do not see its wisdom. However, when applied to the Devil, we get it and more readily admit its wisdom.

[3]We can talk about the influence of the Devil who prefers to work in the shadows of our minds and influence us primarily through our imagination. However, we remain responsible for our actions though the degree of culpability is mitigated by how much our freedom has been compromised.

morality. For example, some may not attend church for various reasons that are not necessarily demonic in origin, though it advances our adversary's purposes.

Of the sources of temptation, the Devil's involvement is one of three possibilities. I suppose the Devil is pleased that we human beings do not always need his help to get it wrong! Still, we can end up inadvertently serving the Devil's agenda. I cannot help but think he is very willing to lend a hand, preferring to stay in the background where evidence of his involvement is murky.

Others may believe that talking about the Devil belongs to an earlier time when demonic behavior was confused with what we now call mental health issues or improperly diagnosed physical illnesses. As I mentioned in previous reflections on *The Marist Way of Responding to Secularism*, a secular mentality preaches there is nothing beyond the physical world. Consequently, any talk about the demonic is dismissed as belonging to a time when human beings were ignorant of how science and human reasoning could explain phenomena that were then mysterious. That was certainly not the attitude of Christ, the Son of God, nor can it be for his disciples. It is certainly not the teaching of the Church. In the Nicene Creed, we profess, "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and *invisible*." I should add that God did not create the devil who is the epitome of evil. The devil created himself that way.

Finally, there is the fear of the demonic that favors "letting sleeping dogs lie." That attitude is captured by the image of an ostrich hiding its head in the sand, hoping a predator will not see it and go away. This falls under the heading "ignorance is bliss" or "what we don't know won't hurt us." Contrast that timidity with these words of the Prophet Isaiah, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10).

Let me conclude with this thought. In the final scene of the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, Regan and her mother are driving away in a car. Happy and finally at peace, they leave the house where they endured so much suffering. Regan, the girl who had been possessed but was now free, does not remember her ordeal. She sees a priest in a Roman collar and instructs the driver to stop and let her out. She runs and hugs the priest and kisses him.

If she had been asked her reasons for doing that, she would not have been able to explain the feelings of gratitude that overwhelmed her at that moment. Somewhere, deeply embedded in her psyche, she remembered the two priests who lost their lives to save hers, whom neither man knew until their paths crossed for that brief but eventful period in her life. The sight of the Roman collar awakened something within her. Regan was paying tribute to the priests who had saved her and remained faithful to their vocation. God, who is love, chose them to be instruments of divine mercy and set things right. In that

simple gesture on Regan's part, "Mercy and truth came together; righteousness and peace kissed." (Psalm 85:10)

In the following reflection, I will examine the contemporary landscape where the demonic is experiencing a resurgence and explore why this may be happening.

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