The Marist Way of Fighting the Battles of the Lord Under the Banner of Mary – Part 4

"Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises?" Renewal of Baptismal Promises

I want to explain why it is important to acknowledge the role the demonic can play in our lives at the same time without creating fear and panic. Devils exist because of God's permissive will. In other words, God does not cause the evil the Devil does. God permits it so that greater good may come from it. Also, the Devil is on a short leash because his power is limited. The Devil cannot read our minds or foretell the future. Yes, the Devil will possess an individual to display his power to weaken our faith in God and to incite fear and despair in us. However, eventually, he is expelled with the help of an exorcist, thereby revealing his impotence before the power of Christ. His preference is to work sight unseen, though, at times, he does like the attention. He cannot escape the sin of pride, which was his downfall.

Not everything we experience is attributable to the demonic. Severe mental health illnesses or the ordinary temptations that are the result of being human and imperfect can explain much of human behavior. That is why the Catholic Church carefully rules out any other causes before the services of an exorcist are requested.

The Devil works to weaken our faith and draw us into his orbit and influence. With that in mind, I want to speak to parents about the importance of attending Mass on Sundays if they are Catholic or worship services if they are Protestant. Over the many years I have heard confessions, you may be surprised as to the number of younger students who want to attend Mass on Sundays but cannot because their parents do not take them.

Parents are responsible before God for the efforts they made or did not make to raise their children in the faith. In the Catholic Rite of Baptism of Infants, the celebrant asks parents, "You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, *you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us,* by loving God and our neighbor. *Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?*" The parents respond, "We do."

Immediately after baptism, parents are presented a lit candle with the celebrant saying, *"Receive the Light of Christ. Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out to meet him with all*

the saints in the heavenly kingdom." Parents can expect to meet with opposition aimed at weakening their resolve. Being faithful will be a battle with the opposition being internal, external, or most likely, both.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's The *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, the Riders of Rohan prepare to ride out on their horses to battle with the evil armies of Mordor who serve Sauron. He is a trusted lieutenant of the epitome of evil, Morgoth, who is the equivalent of Satan. Outnumbered three to one and aware of the daunting task before them, their leader, Eomer, addresses his army and says, "Now is the hour! Riders of Rohan! Oaths you have taken, now fulfill them all, to Lord and land."

Like it or not, we are involved in a cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness. It may feel like we are outnumbered and outmatched. Those parents who are wavering in their resolve or burdened at the enormity of passing on the faith in a more secularized world, let me encourage you, "Now is the hour to honor the baptismal promises you have made, to keep the flame of faith entrusted to you alive in the hearts of your children. Now fulfill them to Lord and Church!"

Here is why parents need to honor their promises at baptism to keep the flame of faith alive in the hearts of their children. I will quote again Dr. Gallagher, who observes, "It's quite clear that mainstream religions, not just Christianity, have declined in recent decades. *People generally develop a substitute belief system when giving up a mainstream or orthodox religion. That often involves ideas about energy forces, occult themes, and visitation by spirits. A lot of exorcists feel that, through alternate spiritualties, people have opened themselves up to evil forces and evil spirits in ways that more mainstream religious people are protected from."*[1]

Parents are the religious leaders of the family. As such, they are called to be Christ, the Good Shepherd, to their children and to protect them from the wolf entering the sheepfold (family). Failing to practice their faith gives a bad example and undermines what Marist is doing to form the whole person in the image of Christ. It opens the door to their children becoming more vulnerable to the influence of the Devil who works to weaken our faith and draw us into his orbit and influence. He is single-minded and relentless in his pursuit of our spiritual destruction. St. Peter captured that resolve when he wrote, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

C.S. Lewis understood what is at stake when he wrote, "[When we die] will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not.

[1] Dr. Richard Gallagher, Demonic Possession Expert, Isn't Trying to Convince You, by Adrienne Westenfeld, October 2, 2020. Dr. Richard Gallagher, Demonic Possession Expert, Isn't Trying to Convince You (esquire.com).

Now, today, this moment is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it."[2]

That will help explain why the Bible has so much battle imagery. It reflects the reality that we are involved in a spiritual war. That is why the Church on earth is called the Church Militant. When in the thick of the battle and bullets are flying in all directions, soldiers will admit at that moment they fight not so much for their country or freedom, as important as those are. Instead, they are fighting for their comrades in arms, beginning with those who are shoulder-to-shoulder with them.

We do not fight for Christianity. We fight for Christ, for each other, and for everyone whom God has loved into existence, especially those who fall and are held captive by the sinful forces at work in the world, whatever their origin. Christ, who defeated Satan by the wood of the cross, fights with us. That is why Satan has such an aversion to the cross. It reminds him of his crushing defeat when he had thought the moment of Christ's death signaled victory was his.

It is essential that our Marist students and your children have a relationship with Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. We want them not only to know about Christ. We want them to know him, to walk with him in easy friendship as it was in the beginning when God would walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. That relationship begins and is nourished through the sacraments in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. That is where and how the flame of faith will continue to burn brightly. Together with all Christians, each flame of faith merges into one beacon to become *the* Light of Christ to the World, compelling the forces of darkness[3] to retreat.

Still, why does it appear that the demonic influence is growing when Christ has already defeated Satan and his minions?[4] A wounded rat cornered with no escape becomes more ferocious, realizing his time is running out. The Devil knows that the time is coming when Christ will come again and establish the Reign of God in power, glory, and majesty. He knows that he cannot go up against God directly. Instead,

[2] Reflections: Choosing Christ Now, C.S. Lewis Institute on October 1, 2007. https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/reflections-october-2007/.

[3] Fr. Colin named the forces of darkness as being pride, greed, and power (domination and manipulation). They are a kind of unholy trinity that gives birth to other evils and sins such as those enumerated in the First Reflection.

[4] For examples of this, google "celebrities who mock Christianity." They often receive raucous and loud applause from audiences. This would have been unheard when I grew up in the 1950s.

he attacks human beings whom he hates with a passion since they are made in the image and likeness of God. He wants to get as many human beings on his side as possible while he still has time.[5]

God designated the time between the first coming of Christ and his second coming at the end of the world as a period of amnesty and mercy. The Devil will distort both to mean, instead, God's indifference, powerlessness, and nonexistence. The decline in Church participation and the increase in the number of people identifying as atheists, agnostics, and "none of the above" hints at the Devil's influence. He often leaves clues but not enough to convict.

We should not allow that to obscure the fact that, in principle, Christ has defeated the Devil. The war is over, but human history shows that it takes time for such news to travel and reach everyone involved in the conflict. The job of the Church is to announce this Good News and to serve the eviction notice to the Devil where his influence still holds sway. That makes the Church a kind of resistance movement, advancing the Reign of God, confident of being on the winning side, mindful that not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it while waiting with expectant hope for Christ to come again in power and glory.

In the following reflection, I will comment on the movie *Nefarious* and what it teaches about the tactics the Devil employs to enslave us.

[5] Toward the end of World War II, the Nazi Germans and the Japanese knew the war was lost. However, their resistance to the allies was ferocious to the very end. It was a matter of time for the victory to be finalized. Still, those on the losing side did everything they could to delay the inevitable.