

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

September 6, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

The Devil's Ways

Satan appeared before a small town congregation. Everyone started screaming and running for the front church door, trampling each other in a frantic effort to get away. Soon everyone was gone except for an elderly gentleman who sat calmly. Satan walked up to him and said, "Don't you know who I am?"

The man replied, "Yep, sure do."

Satan asked, "Aren't you going to run?"

"Nope, sure ain't," said the man.

Satan asked, "Why aren't you afraid of me?"

The man replied, "Been married to your sister for over 48 years."

The above joke about the devil demonstrates two important facts about the devil. The first is that the devil is scary. He is after all a fallen angel that is focused on our destruction. The second important fact is that we have nothing to fear from the devil. Jesus has already defeated him. The devil is not God's equal. For some time now, I have wanted to do a series of reflection on the devil because I see people often making one of two errors in regards to understanding the devil. Some people give the devil too much power and other people barely believe that he exists. Neal Lozano in his book: *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* warns us about these two errors:

There is a profound truth in these few sentences by C.S. Lewis: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased with both errors." It is hard to maintain a healthy balance. It is as if the devil himself pushes us toward one of the two extremes.

St. Ignatius of Loyola in his spiritual writings mentions three enemies that we have to be aware of in our spiritual life. The first enemy we must face is ourselves. Even though we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, we still suffer the effects of original sin (a lack of trust in God's love for us) and because of this sometimes we choose to do things our way instead of trusting in God. In order to be a person of faith and the best person we can be, we have to learn to trust in God and do things his way all the time. Not because God is a dictator that punishes us but rather because our God is our loving creator who knows what is best for us.

The second enemy that we face is the world or culture that we grow up in. The society that we live in does not make it easy to live the life God is calling us to. For example it was easier for the people in the North to know that slavery was evil than it was for people in the south because slavery was accepted in South and not in the North. It is hard to be chaste in a culture that is filled with sexual images. This is part of the reason why the Church invites us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These three spiritual movements can help us see where God's plans and the world's plans are different. I believe Archbishop Fulton Sheen says it best in his book *The Life of Christ: In the Beatitudes, Our Divine Lord takes those eight flimsy catchwords of the world—"Security," "Revenge," "Laughter," "Popularity," "Getting Even," "Sex," "Armed Might" and "Comfort"—and turns them upside down. To those who say, "You cannot be happy unless you are rich," He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." To those who say, "Don't let him get away with it," He says, "Blessed are the patient." To those who say, "Laugh and the world laughs with you," He says, "Blessed are those who mourn." To those who say: "If nature gave you sex instincts you ought to give them free expression, otherwise you will become frustrated," He says, "Blessed are the clean of heart." To those who say, "Seek to be popular and well known," He says, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely because of Me." To those who say, "In time of peace prepare for war," He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers."*

The third enemy is finally the devil. Neal Lozano in his book: *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* explains it as follows:

Recently my wife and I watched the movie *Hook*, which tells the story of the grown-up Peter Pan. Peter now has children of his own and has forgotten his former life in Never Never Land. Captain Hook, seeking revenge, comes and steals Peter's children. Hook's plan is based on this scheme: the best way to get revenge on "the Pan" would be to win the affections of Pan's children and become a father to them. He wins the heart of Peter's son, Jack. He presents evil as good, distorts truth about his mom and dad, and brings suspicion on their motives. Gradually Jack begins to dress like the captain, and he forgets who he really is.

This story is an allegory for the human drama. Satan saw the dignity God gave to man and woman, created as they were in His image. Perhaps Satan even had a hint of mankind's destiny in Christ. In his hatred, Satan struck back at God by seeking to destroy His children. The cunning serpent-Satan recognized Adam and Eve a potential to mistrust God's love and he sought to capture their hearts and affections and become a father to them.

I also encourage you to pray the prayer of St. Michael.

Saint Michael the Archangel, Defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil; May God rebuke him; we humbly pray; And do thou O Prince of the heavenly host, By the power of God, thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits Who wander through the world For the ruin of souls. Amen

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September 13, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

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There were three student devils in hell who were about to accompany their teacher to earth for some on-the-job training. Their internship supervisor asked them what techniques they planned to use to get people to sin.

The first little devil said, "I think I'll use the classical approach. I'll tell people, 'There is no God, so sin up a storm and enjoy life.'"

The second little devil said, "I think I'll use a more subtle approach. I'll tell people 'There is no hell, so sin up a storm and enjoy life.'"

The third little devil said, "I think I'll use a less intellectual approach. I'll tell people, 'There is no hurry, so sin up a storm and enjoy life.'"

To which little devil have you listened to lately?

While I was studying the art of spiritual direction and the rules of St. Ignatius of Loyola, one of the older priests stood up and said that the devil only has two lies. The first lie is that "you are not good enough," and the second lie is that "you are alone." He went on to explain that we know that these are lies because with God everything is possible and Jesus is "Emmanuel" (God with us). It was this priest's conviction that all our sins come down to believing one of these two lies from the devil.

Neal Lozano in his book *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* makes the following observations:

1. The word devil actually means accuser or slanderer. By twisting God's words, questioning God's motives, making empty promises and presenting evil as good, Satan captured Adam and Eve, and they submitted to his rule... Suddenly they were afraid of God and no longer received or perceived his love for them. They were also afraid of themselves, so they covered their bodies. That fear is in every person. Many of us deny it. We spend our lives trying to over it.
2. Afraid, self-absorbed, caring for themselves and not God, Adam and Eve began to act like the serpent, accusing each other, defending their actions and forgetting what God was really like. They believed the lie. They could no longer trust God with their lives. The serpent had stolen their hearts.

I know that when I do an examination of conscience and I examine my sins, I find fear and one of those two lies behind all of my sins. Gossip for example, is a combination of the fear of someone seeing my fault and that if people know the real me they would leave me (I am alone). I therefore begin to point out other people's faults in the hope to direct people's attention away from my faults. The truly sad part about this is that I know that people don't want to be around someone who is always pointing out theirs or others people faults and that most of my friendships deepen when I allow myself to be honest with others about my shortcoming. Another example is the fear of not being good enough or capable enough often leads us to cheat or exaggerate our accomplishments.

How do we overcome these lies? How do we learn to trust more in God? We must spend more time focusing on God and remembering all the good He is doing with us. Neal Lozano puts it this way: "Deliverance is not more about the devil than the Exodus was about Pharaoh. Rather, deliverance from evil spirits removes obstacles so we may receive, in Christ, the Father's blessing."

The Secret Service when training its agents to identify counterfeit bills has their agents study real money and not the thousands of fake currency. They know that the more familiar they are with the real stuff the easier it will become to identify the false stuff. In the same way the more we learn about God's Truth the easier it will be to discover the devil's lies.

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September 20, 2015

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There was a large group of people. On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side of the group stood Satan. Separating them, running through the group, was a fence.

The scene set, both Jesus and Satan began calling to the people in the group and, one by one - each having made up his or her own mind - each went to either Jesus or Satan. This kept going. Soon enough, Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowd, as did Satan.

But one man joined neither group. He climbed the fence that was there and sat on it. Then Jesus and his people left and disappeared. So too did Satan and his people. And the man on the fence sat alone.

As this man sat, Satan came back, looking for something which he appeared to have lost. The man said, "Have you lost something?" Satan looked straight at him and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me."

"But", said the man, "I sat on the fence. I chose neither you nor him."

"That's okay," said Satan. "I own the fence."

St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits uses three powerful images in regards to the devil. I would like to reflect with you now on them.

Rule 12: The enemy acts like a woman, in being weak against vigor and strong of will. Because, as it is the way of the woman when she is quarrelling with some man to lose heart, taking flight when the man shows her much courage: and on the contrary, if the man, losing heart, begins to fly, the wrath, revenge, and ferocity of the woman is very great, and so without bounds; in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking

flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with so great malice. – St. Ignatius

Rule 12 (Explained) Remembering that St. Ignatius was a product of his time period, it might be better to think of the enemy as a bully. Often bullies appear scary but when confronted directly back down immediately because they are acting out of fear.

Rule 13: Likewise, he acts as a licentious lover in wanting to be secret and not revealed. For, as the licentious man who, speaking for an evil purpose, solicits a daughter of a good father or a wife of a good husband, wants his words and persuasions to be secret, and the contrary displeases him much, when the daughter reveals to her father or the wife to her husband his licentious words and depraved intention, because he easily gathers that he will not be able to succeed with the undertaking begun: in the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good Confessor or to another spiritual person that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun. – St. Ignatius of Loyola

Rule 13 (Explained) There is often a feeling of a need to be secretive with the devil's temptations as if one needs to be sneaky and not get caught because others would not approve of the actions he is suggesting morally and/or this action he is proposing will produce shame when completed. The best way one can fight this is to be forthright and honest with a trusted individual (a spiritual director or counselor) or a trusted group of individuals (a support group or accountability group).

Rule 14 Likewise, he behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defenses of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us. – St. Ignatius of Loyola

Rule 14 (Explained) The devil in his temptations does not attack us where we are strong but instead he attacks us and tempts us at our weakest point as a good military leader would. It is therefore important for us to be honest with ourselves and take a personal inventory (examination of conscience) to see where we are weak (where we are constantly giving into the devil's temptations). We should then work to strengthen those areas of our life but also being aware at this time that the devil will then begin looking for our next weakest spot.

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September 27, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

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"Respect." God has made us free and respects our freedom to choose his Kingdom or not. Now the Kingdom of God is not a mere abstraction. It has some very specific values and these values are realized and experienced perfectly in heaven. The values of the Kingdom of God include: Love, kindness, forgiveness, justice to the poor, generosity, humility, mercy, chastity, love of Scripture, love of the truth, worship of God, God at the center and so forth. Now the fact is that there are many people in our world who do not want a thing to do with chastity, or forgiveness, or being generous and so

forth. And God will not force them to adopt and live these values. While it is true that everyone may want to go to heaven, heaven is not merely what we want, it is what it is, as God has set it forth. Heaven is the Kingdom of God and the values thereof in all their fullness. Hence there are some (many?) who live in such a way that they consistently demonstrate that they are not interested in heaven, since they are not interested in one or many of the Kingdom values. Hell “has to be” since God respects their freedom to live in this way. Since they demonstrate they do not want heaven, God respects their freedom to choose “other arrangements.” - Msgr. Charles Pope of the Diocese of Washington D.C.

Five Keys

Neal Lozano in his book *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* lays out the following five steps to avoid the devil's grasp and to choose God. His points are numbered and in bold. My suggestions and commentary will be regular font.

1. Repentance and faith

When a Catholic receives ashes on Ash Wednesday he or she is told to “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return” or “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” Both of these statements are meant to remind us that with God we are nothing and with God we are everything. What we have and who we are comes from God and not from our efforts, the world, or the devil. Believe that God really wants what is best for you.

2. Forgiveness

We must learn to forgive others and ourselves while at the same time learn to receive God's forgiveness. No one is perfect and we must do our best to avoid wallowing in our sins or giving up hope. Remember that on Good Friday we did the worst thing imaginable, we killed God, and on Easter Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead and did not seek vengeance but rather forgave us.

3. Renouncing the work of your enemies

This one is pretty simple. If the devil is our enemy and he wants us to do something then we should do the opposite. If the devil tempts us not to pray; we should pray more. If the devil tempts us to hold a grudge; we need to forgive all the more.

4. Standing in the authority you have in Christ.

Trust that Jesus really did rise from the grave. He defeated death. He took the worst that the devil could do and still stands victorious. The devil cannot hurt us if we remain close to Jesus.

5. Receiving God's blessing of your identity and destiny.

Remember that ultimately you are a beloved son or daughter of God. Let us end with these two quotes from Neal Lozano:

In chapter 1, I described God's blessing of Jesus at His baptism. Note that immediately following that declaration of Christ's Sonship, Jesus “was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1). Why would God allow the devil to test His Son? Why would God allow the devil to tempt us? Let us return to the story of the Israelites in the wilderness: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands” (Deuteronomy 8:2). The word tempting could be translated “testing” here. It was time for Jesus to know what in His heart.

What did the temptations involve? At Jesus' weakest point—vulnerable from forty days of fasting—Satan said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3). Satan's second temptation also began with, “If you are the Son of God” (Matthew 4:6). The third stated, “If you will bow down and worship me...” (Matthew 4:9). By testing Jesus' identity as God's Son, the devil tempted Jesus to act independently of the Father. He wanted Jesus to deny what God had declared about His Beloved Son. Similarly, the trials in our lives, the challenges we face, are intended to reveal the truth that God has placed in our hearts. Satan may intend the trials for harm, but God's good plan intends them for good.

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