

Preparation for Spiritual Warfare

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. 1Pet. 5:8-9.

By Lenora Grimaud

Whenever there is a spiritual event that can glorify God, bring healing, wisdom, knowledge, deliverance, understanding, or repentance, we can be sure that Satan will try to “crash the party.” This includes seminars, workshops, prayer meetings, conferences, team meetings, and Magnificat Meals. We can expect to encounter spiritual warfare before, during, and after any of these events. We can expect problems to arise with management, service teams, committees, various ministries, and speakers, as well as attendees. We have to be watchful for the unexpected.

For events outside of our control, we can call upon the Angels and Saints, and especially Our Lady and St. Michael the Archangel for intercession and protection. Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are good preparation on our part, as well as the use of Sacramentals. Receiving the Sacraments before the event is probably the best preparation. Then, we have to trust in the Lord, that God is in control and whatever happens is part of his plan. We need to respond to all mishaps and trials with the *fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

The *fruits of the Spirit* are not automatic or infused. They come from growth in the virtues—natural and supernatural. We receive the seeds of the fruit of the Holy Spirit from the Holy Spirit. But, we have to nurture them and make them grow. We have to cooperate with God and with grace. We have to respond to every opportunity to manifest them. Temptations and trials are opportunities to bear good fruit. The tree produces good fruit when it is nurtured, cared for, picked, and given away. Likewise, the seven deadly sins are vices that produce bad fruit. The more habitual the virtues become, the more we will manifest the fruit of the Spirit. The more habitual the vices become, the more we will manifest the fruit of sin.

The more we grow in virtue and the fruits of the Spirit, the less vulnerable we are to demonic forces, natural or supernatural, within us or outside of us. In order to grow spiritually, we need to be aware of what sin is; of the virtues and fruits of the Spirit, and how to recognize them and manifest them; of the seven deadly sins and vices, and how to recognize them and resist them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church can help us to do this.

1832 The *fruits* of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.”

1834 The human virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions, and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith. They can be grouped around the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

1835 Prudence disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.

1836 Justice consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.

1837 Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

1838 Temperance moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

1839 The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them.

1840 The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have God for their origin, their motive, and their object – God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake.

1841 There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them.

1842 By faith, we believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

1843 By hope we desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.

1844 By charity, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

1845 The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Christians are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Evil spirits will try to find an opening in us in order to use us to cause strife, division, discord, and to block the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. We need to know ourselves and to examine our consciences. The evil one can use any one of us, and will try to find our weak spot. He can only use us if we open ourselves to him through the dispositions of the seven deadly sins: *pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth*. We live with these temptations within us every day. We need to be aware of our weaknesses, as well as our strengths. As Christians, we need to grow in all the virtues, which protect us against these temptations and vices.

Some people find it hard to believe in the existence of Satan or evil spirits, but reason alone, tells us that we are influenced and affected by forces outside of us—outside of our control. Every human being has their own personal demons to contend with (sin); which can be just as demonic as any evil spirit. We can be influenced, affected, and tempted by everyone around us—for good or for evil. We are influenced and affected by the thoughts, moods, demeanor (aura), words, actions, and even prayers of others. The way that we pray, and what we pray for needs to be according to the will of God, out of love for God and others. Some prayers are more like curses than blessings. Prayer petitions should never be a form of gossip, or reveal the sins and weaknesses of others. We should never say anything that we would not want the person we are praying for, to hear.

Vice: A habit acquired by repeated sin in violation of the proper norms of human morality. The vices are often linked with the seven capital sins. Repentance for sin and confession may restore grace to a soul, but the removal of the ingrained disposition to sin or vice

requires much effort and self-denial, until the contrary virtue is acquired (1866). Glossary CCC.

1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”

Pride: One of the seven capital sins. Pride is undue self-esteem or self-love, which seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God (1866). Glossary CCC.

Avarice: [One of the seven capital sins] **2536** The tenth commandment forbids *greed* and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids *avarice* arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods:

When the Law says, “You shall not covet,” these words mean that we should banish our desires for whatever does not belong to us. Our thirst for another’s goods is immense, infinite, never quenched. Thus it is written: “He who loves money never has money enough.”

Envy: Resentment or sadness at another’s good fortune, and the desire to have it for oneself. One of the seven capital sins, envy is contrary to the tenth commandment (2539). Glossary CCC.

Anger [wrath]: An emotion which is not in itself wrong, but which, when it is not controlled by reason or hardens into resentment and hate, becomes one of the seven capital sins. Christ taught that anger is an offense against the fifth commandment (1765, 1866, 2262). Glossary.

Lust: [One of the seven capital sins]. **2351** *Lust* is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.

Gluttony: Overindulgence in food or drink. Gluttony is one of the seven capital sins. (1866).

Sloth: A culpable lack of physical or spiritual effort; acedia or laziness. One of the capital sins (1866, 2094, 2733). Glossary CCC.

Before, during, and after every spiritual event, we can expect spiritual warfare—not because of us, but because of Jesus Christ. The enemy of Jesus is anti-Christ, and these enemies will go after the representatives and servants of Jesus Christ in order to stop the Gospel from being proclaimed and lived; in order to stop Jesus Christ from establishing the kingdom of God and saving man-kind. The enemy is always looking for our “Achilles heel;” our weakest spot. Do we know what our *Achilles heel* is?

We should examine our conscience in preparation for any spiritual event. Is there any unforgiveness, anger, or resentment in our hearts; especially towards anyone that will be present? Is there anyone that we are jealous or envious of? Are we prone to judge others? Jesus says:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Mt. 7:1-5).

Gossip and judging others are probably the most common sins that cause division, and provide an opening for the evil one. We judge those who have a different opinion than us. We judge others who come from a different culture than us; judging them by the standards of our culture. We judge those who have different values and beliefs than we do. We judge those who have different priorities than we do. We judge those who have different traditions than we do. We do need to “test the spirit” and act, accordingly with love. We do need to judge actions at times, but we can never judge the person. Even when we judge behavior and words, it may not be our responsibility to say or do anything about it. We always have to use good discernment. We always have to respond in love. The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us the following teaching:

Judgment, Rash: A fault against the eighth commandment committed by one who assumes the moral fault of the neighbor to be true without sufficient foundation (2477).

2477 *Respect for the reputation* of persons forbids every attitude and word likely to cause them unjust injury. He becomes guilty:

- of *rash judgment* who, even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor;
- of *detraction* who, without objectively valid reason, discloses another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them;
- of *calumny* who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.

2478 To avoid rash judgment, everyone should be careful to interpret insofar as possible his neighbor's thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way:

Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another's statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And if the latter understands it badly, let the former correct him with love. If that does not suffice, let the Christian try all suitable ways to bring the other to a correct interpretation so that he may be saved. (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

2479 Detraction and calumny destroy the *reputation and honor of one's neighbor*. Honor is the social witness given to human dignity, and everyone enjoys a natural right to the honor of his name and reputation and to respect. Thus, detraction and calumny offend against the virtues of justice and charity.

2480 Every word or attitude is forbidden which by *flattery, adulation, or complaisance* encourages and confirms another in malicious acts and perverse conduct. Adulation is a grave fault if it makes one an accomplice in another's vices or grave sins. Neither the desire to be of service nor friendship justifies duplicitous speech. Adulation is a venial sin

when it only seeks to be agreeable, to avoid evil, to meet a need, or to obtain legitimate advantages.

2481 *Boasting* or bragging is an offense against truth. So is *irony* aimed at disparaging someone by maliciously caricaturing some aspect of his behavior.

An example of rash judgment is given in Mk 14:3-9: *And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the jar and poured it over his head. But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor." And they reproached her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."*

Why were these men in this story so indignant about this woman? Was it pride? They were so sure they were right and the woman was wrong. How often do we do the same thing? Everyone is free to have their own opinion, but we are not free to impose our opinions on others, or to judge them, even if our opinions are good. It was a good thing to want to feed the poor, but in this case, the woman was the one who was listening to God, not these men.

Gossip, slander, detraction, judging, and jealousy are probably the most common sins there are among women. They are so common that people don't even think of them as sins, or notice when they commit them. They usually fall under "sins of omission." However, they all stem from the sin of pride: wanting to be first or better than everyone else; always needing to be right and prove everyone else wrong; wanting to be popular, honored, admired, and liked by everyone; wanting to be part of the elite or "in" group; wanting to be the first to know all the latest news about everyone; never able to accept correction; wanting everyone to agree with them and take their side; wanting to have power and authority over others; needing to blame others for everything that goes wrong, and never themselves; and the refusal to forgive others. These sins are the greatest cause of division, quarrels, factions, violence, wars, dissent from the Church, family break-down, and disunity throughout the world. The solution, and preventative is to cultivate the virtues of humility and the fear of the Lord, and to grow in self-knowledge. When we know our weaknesses and what we are capable of, we can forgive anyone, and we will be forgiven. To forgive is to love others as God loves us. To want to be reconciled with everyone is to love much.

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