

HOW THE DEVIL CAN GET A Foothold

In Eph 4:27 St Paul counselled, “do not give the devil a foothold.” Unfortunately, however, in contemporary society many people are rendered vulnerable to the influence of the devil for a number of reasons. Here are some common ones.

- 1 Many people have lost faith in the existence and influence of the devil. They argue that the idea of the evil one is an outdated myth from a pre-scientific age. As Bishop Fulton Sheen said in 1958, “Very few people believe in the devil these days which suits the devil very well. He is always helping to circulate the news of his own death. The essence of God is existence, and He defines Himself as: ‘I am Who am.’ The essence of the devil is the lie, and he defines himself as: ‘I am who am not.’ Satan has very little trouble with those who do not believe in him; they are already on his side.”¹ So the Devil has managed to pass himself off as an anachronism which is his greatest act of cunning. Needless to say, such denial does not change objective reality and leaves people wide open to demonic activity.
- 2 Nowadays large numbers of people are practical atheists in so far as they live as if God does not exist. They are inclined to revere the golden calf of possessions, pleasure, popularity, and power in an idolatrous way. They tend to rewrite the commandments to suit themselves and, as a result, engage in activities that are seriously sinful in God's eyes, if not their own. This is particularly obvious in the whole realm of finances and sexuality, where so many Christian people ignore the ethical teachings of the scriptures and the Church. Not surprisingly, that form of willfulness, which leads to repeated sin of an objectively grave nature, can give evil spirits who “prowl around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8-9), a foothold into the person's life.

The scriptures give the impression that sin is a real barrier to salvation. As St. Peter stated, “It is difficult for good people to be saved; what, then, will become of godless sinners?” (1 Pt 4:18). In spite of that fact, many of our contemporaries are universalists. They believe that the road that leads to heaven is wide and that most people take it. They believe this in spite of the fact that Jesus said the opposite in Mt 7:13. This misguided attitude to sin is undoubtedly contributing to the vulnerability of Christians to the subtle tactics of the evil one.

- 3 There are other people who may have been severely traumatized in the past, e.g., by disturbing events such as physical, psychological, spiritual or sexual abuse. Not surprisingly experiences like these naturally evoke a protective type of anger. If victims do not deal in a forgiving way with the causes of their anger and other negative feelings they can turn to feelings of resentment, vindictiveness, vengefulness, and hate. Clearly, they are un-Godly emotional attitudes because the Lord is unconditionally merciful and loving. That being so, negative antagonistic attitudes, albeit unconscious ones, can provide the devil with an entry point.
- 4 G. K. Chesterton is believed to have said, “When people stop believing in God, it is not that they believe in nothing, they believe in everything.”² I have found in Britain

1 Fulton Sheen, *Life of Christ* (New York: Image, 2008),67.

2 Dr. Pasquale Accardo of New York tracked the quote back to its earliest known appearance in the 1937 study of Chesterton by Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues & G. K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen, 1937). It took the following form: “The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything.”

and Ireland that as people drift away from orthodox Christian belief, they begin to become involved in all kinds of occult and New Age ideas together with superstitious practices such as astrology, palmistry, spiritualism, Reiki, kundalini, fortune telling, contacting the dead, consulting mediums, and using a Ouija board or tarot cards in a misguided effort to contact the world of spirits or to gain control over their lives and their futures. By engaging in these and similar activities, people can unwittingly open themselves to the influence of evil spirits. Pars 2116-2117 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* state,

“All forms of *divination* are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honour, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone. All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one’s service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health – are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another’s credulity.”

- 5 The use of magic-spells and curses of all kinds is based on the belief that it is possible to enlist the support of superhuman beings (evil spirits) and to persuade them to carry out the supplicant's wishes. They may have been focused on a family member in a previous generation and inherited by a relative in the present, or they may be the result of the present day malice and ill-will of someone who bears a grudge.
- 6 Surprising as it may seem, some people actually make a Faustian deal with the devil in order to be empowered to do something or to gain some desired advantage. For example, I have heard how a man in another country gave his soul to the devil in order to have great physical strength and high intelligence. By all accounts his desire was fulfilled.
- 7 The devil, as Jesus warned, is a liar and the truth is not in him (cf. Jn 8:44). Speaking of some people St Paul said, “you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you . . . *thought*” (Col 1:21). People, whose minds are full of misguided thinking and attitudes can become mental strongholds, characterized by false beliefs and attitudes such as, “you are unlovable,” “you can never be forgiven,” “there is no hope for you,” and the like. Not only does the devil foster such thinking, which may have its roots in a difficult childhood or adult traumas, he will use such thinking as a foothold to gain an entry into a person’s life.
- 8 There can be ungodly soul ties in a person’s life as a result of illicit sexual relationships and practices, which may have involved extra marital promises commitments and agreements. Pornography, which is so freely available nowadays, can also create soul ties to the images and people being viewed. Not surprisingly, the devil can exploit these soul ties, e.g., in the form of harmful addictions.

- 9 Increasing numbers of people, who have failed to form an intimate relationship with Jesus, may get interested and involved in false beliefs, e.g., pantheism and reincarnation, or practices, like yoga and transcendental meditation, as well as spiritualities such as the New Age. By unwittingly breaking the first commandment, such a person may open his or her heart, not to God, but to fallen angels who can use non Christian beliefs in order to insinuate themselves into people's lives.

I know that some readers who espouse modern relativist views believe that all religions are equally valid paths to spirituality and to God. As a result they will take exception to what I have said here, believing it is intolerant and even arrogant. But this is the attitude of the Bible which is inspired, e.g., Ps 96:5 warns, "For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils;" Deut 32:16-17 says that when the Jews sacrificed to pagan Gods, "They sacrificed to demons which were no gods;" and again in Bar 4:6-8, we read, "For you provoked him who made you, by sacrificing to demons and not to God." Tertullian said that to address pagan gods their names and images which "were employed by unclean spirits, fallen angels, demons of pagan philosophical tradition, in order to take honor upon themselves and from God."³

On the other hand, 1 Tim 2:5 says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus;" and in Acts 4:12, St Peter proclaimed, "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Experience teaches that to get involved in such things as New Age Spirituality and non-Christian religions can open the door to the influence of evil spirits.

³ As T.D. Barnes notes in his study of Tertullian that he draws his understanding directly from Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro who believed that the gods of the Greco-Roman empire were simply deified men

SELF-DELIVERANCE

A few years ago I read a book entitled, *The Holy Spirit: Unbounded Gift of Joy*, in which Mary Ann Fatula, O.P., said that if a person feels oppressed by an evil spirit, he or she can say a prayer of self-deliverance.⁴ This point introduced me to the notion of self-exorcism. Before looking at it, first a few preliminary questions.

A) Questions to ask yourself

1. The Church teaches that most of the afflictions that people attribute to evil spirits are psychological in origin. Are you on medication, e.g., for depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, or schizophrenia? Are you absolutely sure that your problems are not coming from your unconscious? Have you been assessed by a professional psychologist or psychiatrist?
2. If you are convinced that you are dealing with some form of evil spirit, do you think you are oppressed or possessed? What are your reasons for thinking this?
3. I have mentioned nine ways in which evil spirits can gain a foothold in a person's life. Would any of them apply to you? Remember, it is important to diagnose the origin of the problem if you want to apply the appropriate remedy.

B) Some useful things to do

1. When you have identified how and when the evil spirits got a foothold in your life ask yourself, were you partly responsible? If so repent, by telling God you are sorry for any past wrongdoing in the firm belief that you will be forgiven unconditionally. If you have never invited Jesus into your life, do so now by saying this so called Miracle Prayer slowly and with heartfelt conviction.

“Lord Jesus, I come before you, just as I am. I am sorry for my sins, please forgive me for them all, in your name, I forgive all others for what they have done against me. I renounce Satan, and his evil spirits, and all their works. I give you my entire self, Lord Jesus, now and forever. I invite you into my life Jesus. I accept you as my personal Lord and Saviour. Heal me, and change me, strengthen me in my body, soul and spirit. Come Lord Jesus, cover me with your precious blood, and fill me with your Holy Spirit, I love you Lord Jesus. I praise your holy name. I shall follow you every day of my life. Amen.”

2. If you can identify any wrong attitude, inclination, feeling or action, firstly repent by seeking God's forgiveness ideally in the sacrament of reconciliation and then rebuke it in the name of Jesus, e.g.,

“I rebuke you spirit prompted suicidal thoughts, feelings of worthlessness, resentment, lust, or the occult in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. Then be your own exorcist by commanding the spirits to leave your life, e.g.,

“I command you, spirit prompted suicidal thoughts, or feelings of worthlessness, resentment, lust, or the occult to leave me in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

As St Paul assures us, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the

4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 113.

contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds (i.e. those of Satan). We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-6). If you have any object connected with the occult or New Age, such as a crystal, amulet, charm, etc., get rid of it.

4. If you feel that you have been the victim of a present day or generational curse bless the person/s who may have targeted you or your ancestors. As Rm 12:4 says, “Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them.” You could say this prayer to be delivered from a curse,

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, strengthened by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of Blessed Michael the Archangel, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and all the Saints, and powerful in the holy authority of His Precious and Wondrous Name, I ask, O Lord God, that you break and dissolve any and all curses, hexes, spells, seals, satanic vows and pacts, spiritual bondages and soul ties with satanic forces, evil wishes, evil desires, hereditary seals, snares, traps, lies, obstacles, deceptions, diversions, spiritual influences, and every dysfunction and disease from any source whatsoever, that have been placed upon me. Father in Heaven, please rebuke these evil spirits and their effects and cast them away from me so that I may continue to do Your Will and fulfil the mission you have for me to Your Greater Glory. Thank you, Father, for hearing my prayer. I praise Your Holy Name and worship you and love You. Thank You for the wisdom and light of Your Holy Spirit. Thank you for enabling me through your Holy Spirit to be aggressive against the works of the enemy. Thank you for your Hope, that takes away discouragement; thank you for ongoing victory. “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). Father, I now place my enemies into your hands. Look with mercy upon them, and do not hold their sins against them. Anyone who has cursed me, I now bless. Anyone who has hurt me, I now forgive. For those who have persecuted me, I now pray.”

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory Be...

5. Protect yourself with the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit (cf. Eph 6:17). The following verses are very powerful when it comes to warding off the evil one. Memorize them, and recall them when the need arises. It is significant that when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil he quoted appropriate verses from the book of Deuteronomy. Here are some Bible verses that will help you to protect yourself.

- “The shield of faith puts out all the fiery darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). Roman soldiers had a shield that consisted of two layers of wood and was covered with leather. When their enemies were firing arrows, tipped with burning pitch, in the earlier phase of a battle, the soldiers would douse their shields with water and crouch behind them for protection. St Paul says that the shield of faith will put out *all* the fiery darts of the evil one. Scripture repeatedly makes it clear that the Lord is our spiritual shield. For example, in Prov 30:5 we read: “He (God) is a shield to those who take refuge in him” and in Ps 144:2: “He is my loving God, my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield in whom I take refuge.”

- “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jm 4:7).
- “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Pt 5:8-9).

Take note of the verbs in the second and third quotations. Rather than being words of advice, they are words of command. Rely on God’s Spirit, at work within you, to enable you to obey them (cf. Phil 2:13).

6. Over the years I have found that I can best express my faith by invoking the holy name of Jesus. Nestle in his protection by faith, rather than wrestling with the evil one. As Paul says in Phil 2:9-11, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In other words, no matter what kind of spirit you have to contend with, when you pronounce the holy name of Jesus with faith it will protect you. Col 2:13 assures us, “having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”
7. Aware of the attacks of the devil Pope Leo XIII recommended that Christians should say this prayer daily to the Archangel Michael.

“Holy Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do you, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who wander through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.”

8. If you are a Catholic pray to Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God who was full of grace. She never for a moment consented to the temptations of the evil one. As the new Eve, she is depicted crushing the head of the evil serpent with her foot. Pope Pius IX wrote,

“Just as Christ, the Mediator between God and man, assumed human nature, blotted the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with him and through him, eternally at enmity with the evil serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot.”⁵

I can remember that on one occasion when I was praying for deliverance the Evil One spoke through the woman in a loud, guttural voice as he mocked what I was doing and claimed to have complete control over the woman. On two occasions I told the spirit to be silent, but to no effect. Then in desperation I prayed, “Mary, Immaculate mother of God, help me.” Immediately, the Spirit screeched, “Don’t mention her, I hate her, she is too powerful with God.” I was astonished. The Devil was acknowledging Mary’s influence. So I continued to pray to her until the manifestations quickly ended. You too can have recourse to her. Our Lady’s intercession on your behalf will be powerful with God. Say,

“O Mary conceived without sin, pray for me who have recourse to you.”

⁵ Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, promulgating the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.

9. Each day, make the sign of the cross, with blessed holy water and if possible wear the cross or medal of St Benedict. It is a Christian sacramental containing symbols and text related to the life of Saint Benedict of Nursia, which is used by Roman Catholics, as well as Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and the Western Orthodox. It is believed to be a powerful tool against evil influence which contains the following letters,
- V. R. S. (*Vade Retro Satan*): "Get away, Satan."
 - N. S. M. V. (*Nunquam Suade Mihi Vana*): "Never tempt me with your vanities!."
 - S. M. Q. L. (*Sunt Mala Quae Libas*): "What you offer me is evil."
 - V. B. (*Ipse Venena Bibas*): "Drink the poison yourself!"

The cross can be blessed by using the following prayer.

V: Our help is in the name of the Lord

R: Who made heaven and earth.

V: In the name of God the Father + almighty, who made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, I exorcise these medals against the power and attacks of the evil one. May all who use these medals devoutly be blessed with health of soul and body. In the name of the Father + almighty, of the Son + Jesus Christ our Lord, and of the Holy + Spirit the Paraclete, and in the love of the same Lord Jesus Christ who will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire.

R: Amen.

V: Let us pray. Almighty God, the boundless source of all good things, we humbly ask that, through the intercession of Saint Benedict, you pour out your blessings + upon these medals. May those who use them devoutly and earnestly strive to perform good works be blessed by you with the health of soul and body, the grace of a holy life, and remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

May they also with the help of your merciful love, resist the temptation of the evil one and strive to exercise true charity and justice toward all, so that one day they may appear sinless and holy in your sight. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

R: Amen.

The medal is then sprinkled with holy water.

10. Say this prayer.

"Spirit of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, most Holy Trinity, Immaculate Virgin Mary, angels, archangels, and saints of heaven, descend upon me. Please purify me, Lord, mould me, fill me with yourself, use me. Banish all the forces of evil from me, destroy them so that I can be healthy and do good deeds. Banish from me all spells, witchcraft, black magic, harm, ties, curses, and the evil eye; diabolic infestations, oppressions, possessions; all that is evil and sinful, jealousy, envy; physical, psychological, moral, spiritual, diabolical ailments. Burn all these evils in hell, that they may never again touch me or any other creature in the entire world. I command and bid all the powers who molest me - by the power of God all powerful, in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary - to leave me forever, and to be consigned into the everlasting hell, where they will be bound by Saint Michael the archangel, Saint Gabriel, Saint Raphael, our guardian angels, and where they will be crushed under the heel of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen."

11. It is important to make use of the Church's sacraments because they were intended by Christ to mediate his grace to us. So it is wise to attend the sacrament of reconciliation on a regular basis, e.g., monthly, and to receive the Eucharist, with faith, as often as possible. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick can help to heal traumatic wounds which may have been exploited by the Evil One.
12. If a person/s have injured you in the past by deed or omission try to offer unconditional forgiveness to that person just as Jesus has repeatedly offered you his unconditional forgiveness. As St. Faustina wrote, "He who knows how to forgive prepares for himself many graces from God."⁶ Ask God to bring to mind anyone, living or dead who may need your forgiveness. If you have someone in mind, close your eyes. See the person standing in front of you. Notice that Jesus stands behind that person and that he loves that person as much as he loves you and that he has forgiven that person just as surely as he has forgiven you. Tell the person how you felt about the hurt or neglect they inflicted on you. Now in your heart say this prayer.

"Lord Jesus I thank you for forgiving all my sins even though I didn't deserve to be forgiven. You have brought to mind those who have sinned against me in the past, and who caused me a good deal of hurt. Help me, by your grace to forgive. I know that in asking for this grace I am already receiving it because I am praying within the centrality of your will. In the name of Jesus I now forgive you from my heart for the pain you caused me. I do so without judgment or condemnation. I release you, I call down God's blessing upon you and I thank God you are now forgiven. Amen."

13. When the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future!
14. Say this prayer daily to put on the armour of God.

"Almighty God, today we put on the full armour to guard our lives against attack. We put on the belt of truth to protect against lies and deception. We put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect our hearts from the temptations we battle. We put the gospel of peace on our feet, so we're ready to take your light wherever you send us this day. We choose to walk in the peace and freedom of your Spirit and not be overcome with fear and anxious thoughts. We take up your shield of faith that will extinguish all the darts and threats hurled our way by the enemy. We believe in your power to protect us and choose to trust in you. We put on the helmet of salvation, which covers our minds and thoughts, reminding us we are children of the day, forgiven, set free, saved by the grace of Christ Jesus. We take up the sword of the Spirit, your very Word, the one offensive weapon given to us for battle, which has the power to demolish strongholds, alive, active, and sharper than any double-edged sword.

We ask for your help in remembering to put on your full armour every day, for you give us all that we need to stand firm in this world. Forgive us God for the

⁶ St Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary* (Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2015) # 390.

times we've been unprepared, too busy to care, or trying to fight and wrestle in our own strength.

Thank you that we never fight alone, for you are constantly at work on our behalf, shielding, protecting, strengthening, exposing deeds of darkness, bringing to light what needs to be known, covering us from the cruel attacks we face even when we're unaware. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen."

Conclusion

All of us can ward off the influence of the devil by having recourse to the guidelines described above. They are not intended to be magical. As divinely ordained means, they must be performed with faith, i.e., with firm trust that the Lord *is acting* in the present in accord with the divine promises and will. Remember what Jesus said in Mk 11:23-24, "Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, (e.g. spiritual oppression), 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and *does not doubt in his heart*, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that *you have received* it, and it will be yours."