

**Pastor's Pen:**

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**Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord: Learning Spiritual Warfare Part II**

*This is Part 2 of last week's Pastor's Pen on using Advent as a time to combat the lies of the devil as a way of preparing the way of the Lord in our lives, our families, our parish, and in our Church. This is a 4 part series.*

***The Darkness of Fear***

By fear, I should be clear, what we are and are not talking about. We speak, for example of the gift of the Holy Spirit called 'Fear of the Lord.' In this context, we are talking about having a proper respect for God; that we have a realization that God is God and we are not. It is a humble recognizing of God's dominion over us. By extension, we talk about such fear in regards to respecting truth. For example, a fear of handling rattle snakes is good if one understands the danger they pose and that there is a right way to deal with them. However, some fears fit more into the realm of terror or wariness of the unknown. It is this definition that is appropriate to talking about how the devil uses fear to manipulate us and coerce us into sin.

Something innate in humanity is a fear of darkness. Darkness makes us vulnerable to unseen forces and obstacles, be it the coffee table or a predator. It is hard to make sound decisions when our senses are obstructed.

There is a reason why we refer to the devil as the Prince of Darkness. He is the father of fear. His modus operandi is fear. He feared the creation of humanity as a diminishment of his own creation. His fear led to resentment. His resentment led to rebellion. His fear created pride, a response to his fear: "I must be better than man, for if I am not, I must be inferior." The Devil is like many other entities; what motivates him is how he motivates others.

In the Garden of Eden, the Devil first appeals to fear to manipulate Adam and Eve. "Did God really tell you not to eat of the trees of the garden?" He gets them to doubt that God does not love them and is withholding the knowledge of good and evil because He doesn't want them to be gods. Notice after the fall that the first thing we see Adam and Eve feel is fear; they hide themselves from God. To act in fear gives a sense of shame. They admit to their fear. That fear creates a rift between God and them. The resulting sin leaves a two-fold hole in them: they lose the grace that united them to God (sanctifying grace) and now must struggle against the disposition to sin (concupiscence) until they are called from this life.

Fear still remains a lethal weapon of the devil. Fear is a powerful motivator. Fear can keep our mouth silent when we should speak. Fear can lead us to sin as a matter of perceived self-preservation. Sin can keep us from pursuing God's will, especially if that will leads to priesthood or religious life. Fear is a fuel for selfishness, which is essentially the heart of all sin.

***The Path of Fear***

Fear is potent when it comes to what we call sins of omission. When we fail to act in such a way as to address the needs of others, it leads to injustice. Fear can paralyze us into thinking that if I give to you, I will do without. If I give to God, it will result in my destruction. If I stop and help a person in need, whether they deserve it or not, then it will adversely affect me. I might get taken advantage of. I might get played. I might get conned.

I am not saying some fears are without merit. Giving of the self does demand that we have the willingness to risk being taken advantage of. Forgiving a person who hurt us does leave us vulnerable to be hurt again. However, refusing to take these risks to show mercy and forgiveness, because we fear, only results in poisoning of the soul who carries it. It embitters the soul. Fear is a poison that grows stronger the longer it is allowed to persist in the soul. It isolates the individual because it cuts off the ability to build healthy and truthful relationships.

Life is difficult and fraught with events and people that might well tempt us to fear. God knows this. What is His answer? Simply put, we are told 365 times in the Sacred Scriptures to not be afraid. As with all things dealing with God, He does not tell us something and then not give us what is necessary to carry out His requests.

### ***The Cure to Fear***

In Exodus 14, the people of Israel find themselves hemmed in by the Red Sea and the full power of Pharaoh's Chariots. It would be natural to be deeply in fear. They cry out in that fear to God and Moses. God responds through Moses, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance The Lord will accomplish for you this day! (Exodus 14:13) In this verse, the Lord asks for three things. First: Do not be afraid. Second: Stand firm. Third: See the deliverance.

*Do not be afraid.* This would seem a tall order for the Children of Israel, no? In the face of what seems certain death, God tells them to not be afraid. He is asking them to trust his providence for them. Adam and Eve fell because they failed to trust in God's providence for them. A failure to trust God's providence is to doubt the love of God itself. The first tool to combatting fear is to trust in God's providence for us and that no matter what transpires, God is there with us to help us through. When we cut the devil at the knees by believing in God's love for us, it is easier to progress in faith.

*Stand Firm.* God asks for the people of Israel to be brave. They are to stand their ground, physically, mentally, and spiritually. They are to not cower. This is a call to the spiritual gift and cardinal virtue of Fortitude. Fortitude is what drives men and women living in lands where persecution takes place to practice their faith anyway. Fortitude is what spurs us to take the chance to risk speaking and acting when we should. It gives us the ability to rise above fear and act with forgiveness and compassion; risking that we might well be burned again. When we stand firm in fortitude, we withstand the call to weakness the devil tempts us to.

*See the Deliverance.* This is a call to faith. It is the resolve Jesus asks of Peter in Luke 5:10 when Peter becomes aware of his own sinfulness in the presence of Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish. "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men." No victory is ever won by running away. Peter would indeed catch men as Jesus said. The people of Israel would see the Egyptians defeated. Even the martyrs did not see defeat; for they have witnessed the faith for which they gave their lives grow beyond their wildest expectation. Faith in God flows from love of God. St. John tells us, "Perfect love casts out all fear." (1 John 4:18).

The armaments and armor we are given to fend off fear and repent of our fall to fear are faith, trust, fortitude and love. These God gives us to win against the devil. We must use them.