

**Pastor's Pen:****Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord: Learning Spiritual Warfare Part III**

Among the more powerful weapons the devil uses to incite us to sin is the weapon of wrath. Wrath is an anger that seeks vengeance. Anger, in and of itself, is an emotion that tells us we have been hurt. What we chose to do to resolve anger is what either leads us closer to or further from God.

***Vengeance is mine says the Lord***

Vengeance in our common usage usually means inflicting harm as a mean of returning the harm that has been done to us. We even hear sayings from Scripture, such as above. We hear stories such as Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple. Are these acts of vengeance such as we understand it? If Scripture tells us to model our lives after God, why are we also told to hold back our hands in vengeance? Why is it proper to God?

Vengeance, from the divine perspective, is an operation of justice. It is allowing the consequences for choices to bear out. God gives us what we choose. If we choose to rebel against Him, there is a consequence. This is one of the reasons the heresy of universalism doesn't work: If actions have no eternal consequence, then there cannot be any true right or wrong. There is a string in this heresy that sees purgatory as a place where all the sin of man is dealt with; that somehow sin can be forgiven of those who show no repentance.

The devil, though, has no repentance in him. He believes himself in the right. He believes that the creation of humanity is a slight against him. It is why he hates. It is why he rebels against God. It is why he wars against us. He teaches us to use the tools he uses. He is driven by fear, so he instills fear in us. In his fear, he tries to exact vengeance against God. His primary way is to turn human beings against God as well. His predilection toward vengeance is a central part of his arsenal.

Satan's vengeance is not the same thing as God's. God is just and allows us to choose our path and gives us the consequence to that path. He doesn't cease to love us. His love, though, has the same property as light: a person who is acclimated to the light will find freedom in that light; a person who chooses darkness will find that same light painful and abhorrent. God is love, as St. John reminds us repeatedly, and the same love that binds those in heaven is the same love that burns those in hell. Those acclimated to divine love in this life will revel in joy with it for eternity; those who rejected it and preferred darkness will find it abhorrent for eternity. Satan doesn't cease to hate us; he is our enemy even when we do what he wants. That is why evil can never be sated. That is why vices, bad habits, addictions, and such are bottomless pits.

***God is kind and merciful***

Because God is love, He will choose to show mercy. He desires, as we see throughout the Scriptures, to extend mercy. He wants to forgive us. He makes that clear by what we celebrate at Christmas: He sends the second Person of the Trinity into this world as one of us without losing who He is as the second Person of the Trinity. We call this the Incarnation. Because God wants to

restore the lost relationship with us, He sends His Son among us to seal that relationship again. That new covenant will be sealed by the ultimate act of mercy. The Incarnate God, the babe of Bethlehem (which means House of Bread), will become the man crucified on the Cross as a sacrifice to restore us to God, a sacrifice we partake in especially in the reception of the Bread of Life during the Eucharist.

Hence, those who follow Christ must also be agents of mercy. That mercy is not contingent upon the offending party being deserving of mercy. St. Paul reminds us that Christ died while we were still sinners, not after humanity had done something to merit God's mercy.

### ***Fighting vengeance***

The principle tools we use to fend off these diabolical temptations are mercy and forgiveness. Once again, we exercise these weapons not because those who have harmed us are deserving of such magnanimous behavior, but because it is what is needed.

Undoubtedly, people will ask what they are to do with those who feel no sorrow for what they have done. It is a fair question. What are we to do?

There is an old saying that carrying grudge is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die. Remember that the devil wants you to destroy your relationship with God. He will have you harbor hurt, ill will, and nurture a desire for vengeance that will be overwhelming. We know from various studies that this anger can have detrimental effects to a person emotionally, physically, and spiritually. There is no positive attribute to withholding mercy and forgiveness. Showing mercy and forgiveness can be the ultimate act of self-preservation. Showing mercy and forgiveness only serves to heal us.

Vengeance begets vengeance. If I withhold mercy from you and you return the favor, this downward spiral will continue until one party refuses to make the contribution of vengeance. WE are called to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect; hence, the call to show mercy to the undeserving is part of the call.

### ***Partaking in mercy***

The surest way to see the necessity of mercy is to seek it for ourselves. Sin leads to a spiritual sociopathy. It teaches us to not show sorrow. Hence to learn mercy, we need to seek mercy. We have to have the humility to know of our own sin. Knowing this and seeking the mercy of God for our sins will dispose us to be agents of the same mercy we desire. If I do not see the necessity of the operation of mercy in my life, it will be difficult for me to see it as necessary in the lives of others.

Finally, developing a sense of meekness (patience and forbearance) and humility will be the armor we need to fend off these diabolical attacks. If we know we are in need of God's patience and mercy, we will extend that to others. This is one of the reasons Confession is so very important to the development of the Catholic life.