

The Fight against the Evil Spirit (18/4/2021)

During this period of Holy and Great Lent, the struggle (prayer and fasting) against evil for Orthodox Christians is particularly intense. At Great Compline we pray: "*Lord ... redeem us from all turmoil and cowardice of the one who is approached by the devil*" (Prayer of St. Basil the Great). Or we can look at the conclusion of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy: "*provide and bless the good, crush the heads of the invisible dragons*" (The last Prayer in front of the Icon of Christ). From these prayers alone it is obvious that Satan, the oldest enemy of mankind, is quite real. He is not only powerful, but also very devious. He uses every possible tactic to try and deceive or manipulate us. He hides his movements (like soldiers using camouflage in war), often acting through other people, so that the evil one himself can avoid blame. The devil encourages selfish and proud thoughts in a person, which may outwardly seem beneficial. The pursuit of wealth, fame, and power are then embraced and justified (often speaking in terms of "rights"). These "benefits" are gained using any means necessary, including deception, injustice, thievery, and sinful pleasures. The ancient enemy will then argue that "everyone is doing it," portraying the Gospel as unrealistic and disconnected from "real life."

Faithful Christians know better. As St. Paul the Apostle writes: "*lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices*" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

How far does Satan's power go? Let us examine more closely how he tries to bend a person to his will. We start with the understanding that the devil cannot force anyone to submit to him. Without a person's consent, the demons can achieve absolutely nothing. Those who are terrified of the "Mark of the Beast," "the Seal of Satan," or "666" must realize this. If a Christian does not open their heart to Satan, then Satan cannot bind them. The evil one knows this, which is why he does not show his true face when using his tricks.

How does this happen? The same way it was with Christ on the "Mountain of temptations" in Judea. Satan will come to every Christian, using our mental and/or physical state to tempt us. Without the "Armor of God" (the Faith), constant prayer, vigilance and other "weapons" mentioned by St. Paul (see Ephesians 6:13-18), we are defenseless. If Satan finds someone in this condition, then it will be easy to separate them from the Grace of Christ. Such a person will be bound by Satan, and be his servant.

Even the devout Christian is in danger, if they are not vigilant. At the first touch of temptation, it must be rejected. Any dialogue with the evil one can only lead to disaster. This is how Eve suffered in Paradise. If Eve had immediately turned away from the serpent, the great calamity would not have occurred. This is what St. James encourages us to do: "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7). If a Christian rejects the temptation of his own free will, then with the Grace of God, the

temptation has no power. Such victorious struggles are rewarded by the Lord, and the harder and longer the struggle, the more God's Grace increases.

Of course, every endeavor is not without challenge or injury. It is natural for a Christian to fall sometimes. Usually out of carelessness or selfishness, the fiery arrows of the wicked one find their target. What can be done? Just as the wounded in war look for a doctor, so the wounded soldier of Christ rushes to the spiritual Physician. With repentance and confession, health is restored, and the struggle can continue. No matter how many times the devil strikes the Christian, they do not lose courage. The words of the Apostle of Love comfort us: *"My little children ... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1)*. Let there be no doubt: No matter how great the sins are, the evil one has no power over those who constantly turn to Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters, St. John the Theologian assures us: Christ, who works in us, is stronger than Satan, who rules in the world far from God (see 1 John 4:4). Let us not be afraid, but instead be careful, enduring with faith and humility. With the power of our Crucified and Risen Lord, we will emerge victorious in our spiritual struggle against evil. This is my prayer for all of you.