

## **DEFEND US IN THE DAY OF BATTLE!**

*We listen attentively for the sermons from those priests who are not afraid to use their voices clearly and positively on matters of current concern. When such lucid warnings are given at parish level we believe they warrant a wider audience. For this reason we reproduce here four short pieces, from a secular priest, which address matters of major importance. They provide a brief but thought-provoking commentary on some of today's most serious issues regarding the Faith.*

### **THE POWERS OF DARKNESS**

We are told that there is a renewed interest in religion. This is not always a healthy interest or a return to the riches and wisdom of the Christian Faith. Go into any reasonably-stocked bookshop. Look at the number of publications concerning the occult and astrology. There is a growing curiosity about magic and the dark side of the supernatural. This is a materialist society dedicated to serve idols of Mammon and self-fulfilment at any cost. This curiosity may be naive and sensational; it is also dangerous. The forces of darkness serve one master. He is not the God of Love who lives in unapproachable Light, the source of Life and Goodness. Rather he is that fallen angel, the devil, who has rejected the holiness of God and constantly strives to lure the whole of creation from its Lord by stirring up revolt, hatred and opposition in numerous ways. Look at the turmoil of this age, with all the barbarism and mistrust, leading so many to fear and despair. The devil tempts us to sin with his empty promises. He even tempted Our Lord. He is everything that is evil, murderous and deceitful - in the Scriptures Christ calls him the Father of Lies. Christ did not talk much about the devil - but he taught us how to combat him.

*The Church teaches the existence of the devil and his angels. She does not exaggerate their reality. But nor is she silent about them. With all the wisdom of a true mother she tells us that our life on this earth is a battle against these forces of terrifying wickedness. Their influence is menacing. Sinister cults and satanic groups spread slowly; young people who become involved in them may be ruined by a power far more deadly than the drugs we hear so much about. These forces seek even to destroy the Church. In one of his weekly audiences to pilgrims Paul VI spoke of the 'smoke of Satan' which had entered the Church, attempting to suffocate the fruits of the recent Council. Later his successor returned to the subject in his weekly catechesis. To many people today these truths seem nonsensical and superstitious. Even some Christians who crave so much for acceptance and accommodation to the spirit of the age will deny these beliefs. In the face of this widespread scepticism the Church boldly proclaims the irreversible victory of Jesus Christ over Satan and his kingdom. In our struggle she lends holiness. Among the weapons she offers us we have that of the powerful intercession of the saints and those angels who remained loyal in the beginning. We can be confident of their help. During the liturgical year we celebrate two feasts of the Holy Angels. We need not be alarmed; the Church bids us turn to them. They will not fail us.*

### **LISTEN TO HIS VOICE**

More than sixty percent of all the people who have ever lived are alive today. Our world has seen immense changes affecting people's lives, their attitudes and behaviour. For Catholics this presents opportunity and challenge. So many outside the Church search for a meaning to their lives, trying to cope with difficulties in their work relationships and fearing for the future. Deep within they are searching for God who alone can answer our needs. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, who has founded his Church to spread the Good News. This News - if listened to and welcomed - brings true joy and light to sad, lonely and empty lives. It brings peace to the old and inspiration to the young. It springs from the very core of the Church's bold proclamation: the death and Resurrection of Our Lord. To everyone who accepts this message it gives real hope. To know we are led by the Father and saved by the blood of his Son is not a fantasy. *It is the Truth.*

When Christ began his Church, he appointed Peter its visible head on earth. Peter and those who succeed him, the Bishops of Rome, interpret the mind of Christ for us. The Pope's role is unique. When he speaks on matters of faith and morals it is with the authority of Our Lord. Thus the Church is not bumbling around in the dark, seeking some answers, as some theologians would have us believe. She proclaims the truths of the Gospel as Christ commanded her.

But to listen to the truths of the Gospel is not enough. We must welcome them and give our assent to them. We must try to live by everything the Church teaches. Among the many voices claiming our allegiance the Church's must be the only one we listen to. For this we need to be obedient. These days, obedience to any authority is not fashionable. We hardly hear the word. It is associated only with dog training sessions. To obey, for us, is to welcome God's purposes, bending our wills to Him and acknowledging that he knows how we are to live. What influences us the most? What do we really trust? Current attitudes and the fashions of a secularised world - or God's message mediated to us through the Church? When recent Popes have spoken in ways which offend the accepted wisdom of this age they have been insulted and ridiculed. In answer to the Church's clear teaching on some important matters many Catholics openly dissent, rejecting Her authority, while others quietly ignore what She says and carry on in their own way.

The damage which this turbulence inflicts on the Church's energy and mission is grave. Her history is full of crises, clashes and not a little madness. Yet Her holiness is one of Her four marks. The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Christ, the Bridegroom, will never desert her. But He is calling all his members to a greater fidelity, to a ready and deeper trust in Him and His teaching. In the countries of Western Europe, where it has been long established, the Faith is almost exhausted. If there is to be a resurrection, it can only come about by God's grace renewing the present generation. It will begin when Catholics, far from picking and choosing, embrace the Christian life in all its fullness, not shirking the demands it makes.

### **FAST AND PRAY**

Jesus Christ tells us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Each disciple is called to self-denial and conversion of heart. Self-denial is part of the life of every Christian, young and old. For those adults who are strong and healthy one excellent means of this self-denial is by fasting, one day a week, on bread and water. Traditionally the Church has marked Friday as set aside for penance. Fasting and prayer are not gloomy. There are many benefits. They can draw us into closer union with God and an awareness of our neighbour. Fasting helps us to clear away some of the trivia in our lives which distract us from seeking God wholeheartedly. The advertisements tell us to pamper ourselves, to indulge every whim - seeking comfort and security in material possessions. Fasting ridicules these false and empty values. Fasting lifts us out of one world and into another world. Fasting weakens the power of the devil over us; it can soften a heart that is hardened by malice and resentment; it can liberate a soul enslaved by lustful passions. Fasting gives us a share in the sufferings of Christ. Regular fasting becomes an act of worship whereby the whole person longs for God and pines for His life. Fasting, or any form of asceticism, are not ends in themselves. Their aim is to a life centred less on the self and more on the things of Heaven. One frequent danger is the temptation to pride. Some religious folk do great acts of self-denial to the vast edification of others and no small satisfaction to themselves. Our quest for God must not lead us to smugness and a feeling of spiritual superiority over others. Spiritual pride is the deadliest of all sins.

A Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome reminded the whole Church that the vocation of each Catholic is to holiness. The root problem facing the Church is that we are not holy enough. The bishops are not holy enough. The priests are not holy enough. The laypeople are not holy enough. A voice is calling out to the Church. It is the voice of Jesus Christ calling us to conversion of heart and a fuller life in Him. This is echoed by Our Lady who encourages her children to greater prayer and penance for their sins and the sins of the world. We are to find time for prayer when instead of doing all the talking we begin to listen to God. We can find opportunities each day to make small sacrifices, accepting the little crosses which come our way. Those of us who are able to can fast on water maybe with a little bread.

Self-denial is an essential part of our life. The cross of Jesus Christ shows us there is no other way. It leads to life. Our Catholic Faith is balanced and healthy. We are not to be puritanical; Catholics are to know how to fast and how to feast. The practice of Christian asceticism is positive. It aims to restore our likeness to God. We only seek the Cross, not for itself, but because that is where we find Our Lord hanging.

## **KYRIE ELEISON**

Who will tell us the truth about ourselves? Where can we find acceptance for our shortcomings? Where can we find the antidote to our sins? The answer to these questions is the Church. She tells us of our reality in the sight of God; that we are sinners whose lives are in need of healing. She calls us to this healing - it is to be found in the Sacrament of Confession. It is a truly great Sacrament. It is where we can meet Jesus Christ and taste of the mercy of God. Christ himself gave this to us; it is a gift to his Church. That is why She asks us to use this gift. Often.

The Church tells us we need this. Because of the havoc, the unhappiness and the estrangement which sin brings about in our lives. Sin warps us, destroying the life of God in us. We don't like to hear this. We would far sooner be told what wonderful, beautiful people we are, doing just fine. The Church does not pretend. She calls us to examine our lives and to turn with confidence to the fount of mercy. When we turn to God he always accepts our humble prayer. It is not enough to know our sins and be sorry for them. We must confess them. Openly. Between Heaven and earth. To a priest who represents Christ and is a witness for the whole Church. I must confess my greed, my complacency, my lust, my dishonesty. I need to speak these things aloud, to name these sins and, by so doing, bring them up from the darkened depths into the light. What is in the light can be overpowered, it can be cured.

When we come to Confession we speak to a priest who is not just another man but who represents the Church. The priest's role is limited for it is Christ Himself who is present at the centre of this mystery. Each time we go to Confession we enter into this mystery of God's forgiveness. His forgiveness is like the ocean - and, in throwing ourselves on His mercy, we plunge into His unfathomable and inexhaustible love.

The Easter mystery especially is all about forgiveness and reconciliation. Very many people prepare for this event by a sincere repentance for their sins. True repentance must always accompany the confession of sins - otherwise it becomes an empty ritual. However, many stay away and while the queues for Holy Communion grow longer, the queue for confession is short - sometimes very short, or even non-existent. This cannot be sound. We cannot be that good. Perhaps one reason is that we no longer appreciate the ugliness of sin, we no longer recognize it in our lives. More than fifty years ago Pope Pius XII said that the great sin of the century is that we have lost the sense of sin. Since then things have got worse. We need to rediscover the treasures of this neglected sacrament which should play a vital role in our lives as Catholics. To make the frequent practice of a thoughtful and sincere confession of our sins and receiving the mercy of God can only be of immense benefit to us. It is a help along the pilgrim path to salvation. It is Christ's gift to his Church.

## **PRAYER TO ST. MICHAEL, ARCHANGEL**

Holy Michael, the Archangel, defend us in the day of battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust down to hell Satan and all the wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.

## **PRAYER OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS**

Grant, Lord, that I may gladly share what I have with the needy; humbly ask for what I need from him who has; sincerely admit the evil I have done; calmly bear the evil I suffer; not envy my neighbour for his blessings; and thank You unceasingly whenever You hear my prayer. Amen.

[www.catholicassociates.com](http://www.catholicassociates.com)

e-mail: [mfandra@hotmail.com](mailto:mfandra@hotmail.com)