

This past Sunday, I was profoundly struck by the Epistle for Holy Mass (Third Sunday after Pentecost) and have been pondering it ever since:

“Dearly beloved: Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation: Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you. *Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist ye, strong in faith: knowing that the same affliction befalls your brethren who are in the world.* But the God of all grace, Who hath called us into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you. To Him be glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Pet. 5:6-11) [emphasis added]

Three Vicious Enemies

Of the three enemies of our souls - the world, the flesh, and the devil - the latter is typically the most subtle and difficult to combat. “The flesh”, that is, our fallen human nature with its tendency towards sin, is so obviously problematic that G.K. Chesterton famously wrote in his book [Orthodoxy](#) (1908), fourteen years prior to entering the Catholic Church:

“The ancient masters of religion...began with the fact of sin - a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or not man could be washed in miraculous waters [i.e. Baptism], there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted washing. But certain religious leaders...have begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt. Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.”[\[1\]](#)

In other words, anyone who denies the reality of sin, whether [original](#) or [actual](#) (personal), and its effects on human nature is either delusional or dishonest - “erring, and driving into error” (2 Tim. 3:13), as St. Paul says.

“The world” - not creation itself, which is “very good” (Gen. 1:31), but the spirit of rebellion against God that was introduced by sin - is likewise obviously “seated in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). St. John thus exhorts us:

“Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the

world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God abideth forever.”
(1 John 2:15-17) [emphasis added]

The devil, on the other hand, usually lurks behind the world and the flesh, rarely manifesting himself plainly. Although his will is thoroughly corrupted, his angelic intellect retains the brilliant knowledge proper to his nature (cf. [Summa Theologiae](#) I, q. 64, a. 1) - knowledge that is vastly superior to our own. Therefore, as the master deceiver, he knows how to lure us away from God by goading our disordered passions and convincing us that his promise of temporal goods (e.g. riches, power, fame, pleasure) is far better than anything the Lord has to offer. He can even “transformeth himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) in order to make himself seem quite appealing.

How, then, do we effectively resist the devil “strong in faith”, as St. Peter exhorts us? One powerful means is found in a devotion that Holy Mother Church - and Christ Himself - urges all of us to embrace, and particularly during the month of [June](#): devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.[\[2\]](#)

One Strong Defense

In a certain sense, the three enemies mentioned above are actually more like ambassadors or lobbyists for the real threat, the only thing that can truly separate us from God, namely, *sin*. And why do we choose to sin? I suppose there are many reasons, but fundamentally, the cause is always *a lack of love for God or neighbor*. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15), Our Lord tells us, and St. Paul affirms the same in relation to our fellow man: “The love of our neighbor worketh no evil. Love, therefore, is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

We can only give what we have, however, so if we are lacking in love (*caritas*, “charity”), we will inevitably fail to love God and our neighbor as we should. All of us, in varying degrees, are in need of growth in charity, which is why we all need strong devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen explains in [Divine Intimacy](#):

“In the Encyclical [Annum Sacrum](#), Leo XIII declares, “The Sacred Heart is the symbol and image of the infinite charity of Jesus Christ, the charity which urges us to give Him love in return.’ ...

The Church offers us the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to stir up our love. After reminding us, in the Divine Office proper to this feast, of the measureless proofs of Christ's love, this good Mother asks us anxiously, 'Who would not love Him Who has loved us so much? Who among His redeemed would not love Him dearly?' (Roman Breviary). ... This, then, is the substance of true devotion to the Sacred Heart: to return love for love, 'to repay love with love,' as St. Margaret Mary [Alacoque], the great disciple of the Sacred Heart, expresses it..."

Fr. Gabriel goes on to highlight a crucial point concerning our perception of God and its effect on how we relate to Him:

"The attitude we take in our spiritual life depends greatly upon the idea we have of God. If we have a poor, impoverished concept of God, like the slothful servant in the Gospel (cf. Matt. 25:14-30), instead of being impelled to love Him and to give ourselves generously to His service, we shall be cold, indolent, calculating; and burying the talent we have received from the Master, we shall not trouble ourselves to use for God the benefits we have received from Him. Unfortunately, many Christians live this kind of life; they serve Him like slaves, and if they do not commit sin, it is only through fear of being punished; if they pray or perform some good work, it is for their own personal interest and is devoid of generosity and love. When, on the other hand, our soul begins to understand that Deus caritas est, 'God is charity' (1 John 4:8), when we penetrate even slightly the mystery of the infinite love that surrounds us, realizing God's love in the love which Jesus has for us, then everything changes spontaneously, because 'love calls to love.' Devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is devotion to the infinite love of Jesus, should produce this particular effect in us: it should give us an ever increasing comprehension of 'the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge' (Eph. 3:19)." [3] [emphasis added]

The devil does everything he can to convince us that God is a cruel tyrant, an obstacle to true freedom and happiness. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, on the other hand, reminds us that "God is charity", and that our hearts are restless until they rest in Him, as St. Augustine famously wrote in his *Confessions* ([Book I, Ch. 1](#)).

Receiving the Sacred Heart in Holy Communion

“Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine.” This beautiful prayer, based on Our Lord’s words in Matthew 11:29, is at once simple and profound, much like devotion to the Sacred Heart. In order to love as He loves, and thus avoid the poison of sin, we need our hearts to be conformed to His Heart - or rather, we need His Heart to live and operate in our hearts: “And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). This is precisely why Our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist, that we may receive His Sacred Heart, together with an increase in divine charity, each time we receive Holy Communion in a state of grace. Here, again, we turn to Fr. Gabriel’s rich insights:

“After we have contemplated the Eucharist [on the [Feast of Corpus Christi](#)], a gift crowning all the gifts of the love of Jesus for men, the Church invites us to give direct consideration to the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the source and cause of all His gifts. We may call the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the feast of His love for us. ... *The Heart of Jesus is always in search of souls to save, to free from the snares of sin, to wash in His Blood, to feed with His Body. The Heart of Jesus is always living in the Eucharist to satisfy the hunger of all who long for Him, to welcome and console all those who, disillusioned by the vicissitudes of life, take refuge in Him, seeking peace and refreshment.*”[\[4\]](#)
[Emphasis added]

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, the same Heart that was “formed by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary” (Litany of the Most Sacred Heart), is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.[\[5\]](#) This is not a pious fantasy; it is a living reality, and one that Our Lord Himself has proven on several occasions through Eucharistic miracles—for example, at Lanciano, Italy in A.D. 750 (see [here](#) and [here](#)) and Buenos Aires, Argentina in A.D. 1992/94/96 (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Jesus *literally* gives us His Heart in order to make our hearts like unto His. Why? That we may be able to say “yes” to our heavenly Father and “no” to the father of lies, according to His own example. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas refers to the Blessed Sacrament as “a strong defense against the snares of all enemies, visible and invisible” in his Prayer after Holy Communion.[\[6\]](#)

To Jesus through Mary - Fatima Connection

So, we see that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, is our “strong defense” against both satan and sin. The question is, how do we best receive His Heart in Holy Communion and cooperate with His grace? Once again, the

answer is simple yet profound: Mary.

“The Eucharist is the Bread of the Mother of God, our Mother. It is Bread made by Mary from the flour of her immaculate flesh, kneaded with Her virginal milk.” Thus writes Fr. Stefano Manelli, founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate (F.I.), in his beautiful devotional work [Jesus, Our Eucharistic Love](#). He goes on:

“We know, too, that in the Eucharist, together with the Divinity, are the entire Body and Blood of Jesus taken from the body and blood of the Blessed Virgin. Therefore, at every Holy Communion we receive, it would be quite correct, and a very beautiful thing, to take notice of our holy Mother’s sweet and mysterious presence, inseparably and totally united with Jesus in the Host. Jesus is ever her adored Son. He is Flesh of her flesh and Blood of her blood. ... Therefore, it will never be possible to separate Jesus from Mary.”[\[7\]](#)

Interestingly, Our Lady chose to manifest her Immaculate Heart to the three shepherd children at Fatima for the first time on *June* 13, 1917, that is, during the Month of the Sacred Heart. She [told](#) Lucia, the oldest child, “Jesus wishes to make use of you in order to make me known and loved. He wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart,” and further, “Do not lose heart, I will never forsake you! **My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.**” [emphasis added]

Years later, in a letter addressed to her confessor, Fr. Jose Bernardo Gonçalves, S.J., Sister Lucia disclosed the following about the Immaculate Heart of Mary, particularly in connection with the [consecration of Russia](#):

“Intimately I have spoken to Our Lord about the subject, and not too long ago I asked Him why He would not convert Russia without the Holy Father making that consecration? [*Jesus answered*] ‘*Because I want My whole Church to acknowledge that consecration as a triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that it may extend its cult later on, and put the devotion to this Immaculate Heart besides devotion to My Sacred Heart.*’”[\[8\]](#) [Emphasis added]

Thus, we see that Christ Himself wants us to approach Him through the Immaculate Heart of Mary; and the reason, according to St. Louis De Montfort, is this:

“All our perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ; and therefore, the most perfect of all devotions is, without any doubt, that which most perfectly conforms, unites and consecrates us to Jesus Christ. Now, Mary being the most conformed of all creatures to Jesus Christ, it follows that, of all devotions, that which most consecrates and conforms the soul to Our Lord is devotion to His holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to Mary, the more it is consecrated to Jesus.”^[9] [Emphasis added]

Sacred Heart of Jesus, May Thy Kingdom Come!

In closing, let us return once more to the words of St. Peter:

“Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist ye, strong in faith: knowing that the same affliction befalls your brethren who are in the world.”

The battle is not easy, to be sure, but it will be worth it, for

“the God of all grace, Who hath called us into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you. To Him be glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen.”

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in Thee!

Notes

^[1] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane Company, 1909), p. 24.

^[2] June may very well have been designated the “Month of the Sacred Heart” due to the fact that Our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a French Visitation nun, on **June 16, 1675** during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and requested “that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be set apart as a special feast in honor of My Heart...” (*Life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque* [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1890], p. 237).

^[3] Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., *Divine Intimacy* (Baronius Press, 2015), p.

612-613 (Meditation #211 - Returning Love for Love).

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 603-604 (Meditation #208 - Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus).

[5] This is a consequence of transubstantiation, as the Council of Trent infallibly teaches “that immediately after the consecration the true Body of our Lord and His true Blood together with His Soul and Divinity exist under the species of bread and wine...**For Christ whole and entire exists under the species of bread and under any part whatsoever of that species, likewise the whole (Christ) is present under the species of wine and under its parts.**” (Sess. XIII, Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist, Ch. 3 - Denz. 876) (Emphasis added)

[6] [*The Daily Missal \(1962\) and Liturgical Manual*](#) (London: Baronius Press, 2007), p. 91.

[7] Fr. Stefano M. Manelli, F.I., *Jesus, Our Eucharistic Love: Eucharistic Life Exemplified by the Saints* (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 1996), p. 106.

[8] Sister Lucia dos Santos, letter of May 18, 1936; cf. Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, *The Whole Truth About Fatima Vol. II: The Secret and the Church* (Buffalo: Immaculate Heart Publications, 1989), p. 631.

[9] St. Louis De Montfort (trans. Fr. Frederick William Faber), *True Devotion to Mary* (Rockford: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1985), p. 77 (n. 120).