

Warfare of the Soul: Part 1

“That God may enlighten the eyes of our soul, to guide our feet in the way of that peace which surpasses all understanding.”

These words, from a prayer composed by saint Bonaventure form the basis of the spiritual life. The key that unlocks its meaning is found in the opening phrase: “That God may enlighten the eyes of our soul.” Meaning that the spiritual or inner life has absolutely nothing in common with this material world. God cannot be seen, much less understood, without the aid of an informed soul. Our physical eyes can be deceiving and therefore cannot be trusted with spiritual truths since such truths often counter the habits of a fallen world. They are at odds with each other.

Allow me to give you an example: Darwinism. It states that we humans evolved from monkeys. Yet, this cannot be true since there are still monkeys. Every atheist holds fast to Darwinism. Spiritual truth however, is very clear in its belief of the existence of the soul. Animals do not have souls. Apart from the description in Genesis 2:7, which states that God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into man’s nostrils his spirit imparting in him a living soul, where does it say God did the same with animals? But the atheist says the scriptures cannot be true since we came from animals. Therefore, since the bible is wrong, how can God be real?

Here is why they are wrong. You and I have personas. That is, we are who we are in our souls. Our personalities reside there. Our thoughts, feelings and emotions emerge from our souls. My thoughts and feelings are not found in my blood or my skeletal system but in my mind, my intellect. I develop my thoughts and conclusions based on the information in my soul. If I come to a decision based solely on my intellect and don’t engage my soul in the process the chances are that my conclusion will not be fully informed.

As far as animals are concerned consider the horse. A horse simply reacts. There is no intellectual basis for his responses. A horse has a brain the size of a human fist or small potato; its emotional state

is that of a three- year old child. When it feels pain it runs to get away from the pain. It doesn't think about its source or apply reason in order to figure out why it is in pain. It just responds. If you are riding a horse and a thunderstorm breaks out complete with lightening, you better hold on because you are going to go for one heck of a ride. The horse cannot run away from or escape the storm, it just reacts that way. If I get hit with a bullet, I not only realize I am in pain, but I know why. Someone shot me with a gun. An animal does not know this. It knows absolutely nothing about why it is in pain nor does it know it's in pain. Monkeys, gorillas or kangaroos, all animals are the same. They cannot reason and think. A trained animal is just reacting to something it has learned by rote over and over.

Man, or human beings are mind, matter and spirit. We are spiritual by nature. If we go back to Genesis we learn God created man from the dust, or his physical body, and breathed into him his spirit or nature and man became a living soul. Our souls are housed in the spiritual side of our being. This is why Saint Peter can say in his second epistle: "be partakers of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1:2-4. There is within each of us the spirit of God and our souls are part and parcel of that spirit. This separates us from the animals. We are called in scripture to take command over them, not enjoy equality with them. We are their stewards. Jesus said whomever keeps my commandments my father and I will make our abode in them -in the soul. No where in scripture will you find Jesus saying this to animals. Because they do not have souls. Therefore, atheism is flawed. It is not possible for humans to evolve from animals.

I said recently that we can no longer use the phrase "the sky's the limit," because we now have footprints on the moon. It may not be an accurate phrase since the definition of the sky is always subject to debate: is it the firmament referred to in the first chapter of Genesis which describes a separation of the earth from the sea and the heavens, or is it that unreachable plain in an ever- expanding universe? But, this would be to miss the point, it being that much

of the spiritual life dwells outside of human reason and reaches into the supernatural which is above and beyond this world.

There are three forms of existence: the natural order which we are in at the moment, the sub-natural world, which is death and the supra-natural world which resides outside of both of these realities. The spiritual life is concerned with the later, the supernatural order, which transcends the natural order and where miracles and the unexplained exist.

Spiritual warfare makes its presence in the supra-natural order and it is a very real and certain reality. There is a war taking place in life. Evil verses good. It takes place in the here and now but cannot be understood much less overcome with out the help of God. Spiritual warfare is personal, involving the person, the divine, angelic, human, God, Satan and takes place in the soul. Let us remember the somber words of Saint Paul in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 12:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The sum total of this statement warns us about what the world can be without God or countries. Encouraging people to live below God’s expectations.

The old story of a grandfather native American or Indian, who sits his grandchildren around a campfire and informs them that in life there are two wolves, one is good the other bad. Both are engaged in a constant battle for the control of everyone living. One of his grandchildren asks “which one wins, grandfather? The old man looks at the boy and says “the one you feed.” The story reveals the very work of Satan. Each soul has a guardian angel. This is God’s doing. Conversely, each soul has assigned to it, by Satan, an attendant evil spirit, the sole function of which is to lead the soul into sin. The supernatural is about good and bad. There are powerful forces of evil in the supernatural order. Unseen forces: evil angels, demons, powers of darkness and light moving about quietly

and mysteriously like the wind. You cannot see the wind but you can see its effects. So it is with these unseen forces that are constantly in battle for control. This is exactly what Paul was getting at.

We are told by Christ himself that he has overcome the world, but the world refuses to accept it. There are many who don't even know this.

The Psalmist writes "Wherever I go God is there. If I ascend into heaven, thou art there. If I descend into hell, thou art present. If I rise early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. Psalm 139: 7-10. Psalm 17: verse 8 says "O God, keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of thy wings." Both Psalms refer to God as everywhere and protector of his faithful. Whatever we look at, God is within it. Look at the sun. In earlier times, it was called the lamp of heaven. It brings light and warmth into our life. It reflects the goodness of God who has created it. It is the same with the moon and stars; they are the lanterns placed by God in the heavens to guide the navigator. There is the beauty of nature. In other words, the heavens and earth reflect the glory of God.

The seamy side to life on this earth or our fallen state; reveals a deformed, repulsive and loathsome pool of human sin: hatred, cruelty, betrayal, greed, arrogance, lust and all manner of dishonesties. These are the stuff of Satan's attendant evil spirits or demons. One does not need to look far to see demonic activity in this world when it does take form: The internet is filled with it. We live in a contradictory state of being. Beauty, the reality of God and deformity, or the ugly, which reflects the reality of evil. While the beauty of life lived in and with God appeals to what is noble, lofty and inspiring in the human being, the ugly appeals to what is selfish, wretched, squalid and sordid. In spiritual terms God is always the source of beauty in life because beauty points to truth. God is truth. On the other hand, moral ugliness points to error and behavior contradictory to what we were created to be: images of God

and therefore reflections of his truth, when and only when, we live in accordance with his will.

Aberrations, great and small, have come and gone and reappeared throughout history. Human torture, genocide, slavery, dictatorships, persecutions, government by deception and violence, and countless other evils. Russia, the great bear to the north is responsible for the death of one hundred million people since the time of Ivan the terrible to Stalin and Khrushchev.

These are errors and deviations opposed to the goodness of God. Since God is by definition, absolute truth and perfect reality, such abnormalities are out of touch with God's will and reflective of a false existence or living the lies of Satan. Because of the fall of man, the world is no longer a normal place and Russia is just one example.

There are subtle forms of life opposed to the goodness of God. I grew up in the Rock n Roll era and have fond memories of it. But much of it is has one appeal only. If you listen to many of the lyrics they are about sexual desire – not love, but sexual desire undeveloped, untutored and untruthful. An enormous industry grew out of Rock music which beats to the tune of sexual intercourse and provides a constant source of flesh material for voracious appetites which have been cultivated by portraying them as simply natural, void of personal responsibility and true feelings. Schools would rather hand out free condoms rather than discuss the detrimental consequences of unrequited sex by young people who have little or no understanding of the dangers involved. Life lived in the senses or sensual, for selfish and misguided purposes, not decent and honorable. The late Frank Sinatra after hearing rock music for the first time said that it was “the most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear.” His words were prophetic, considering the mutated forms of later rock music, such as heavy metal and rap which portrays life in all of its deviant forms.

No one would describe rock music as graceful, elegant and uplifting the human spirit. There is no real beauty to it because it has no form rather it is deformed. This is why, if you listen carefully, it is filled with ugliness. Senseless banter evaporates moral principles. Those who are surprised at the rapid rate of violent crime in our post-modern, unprincipled society of mindless vandalism, physical and sexual abuse of women and children, drugs and alcohol related crimes have been conditioned to believe these are norms, good and bad housed in the human psyche. In his wonderful book The Evidential Power of Beauty, Fr. Thomas Dubay writes of reading a news story about a teenager who shot a stranger “to get the experience of what it’s like to kill someone.”

There is a line in one of the late Johnny Cash’s songs that says “I shot a man just to watch him die.”

One does not have to be a genius to know the root cause of this anti-life behavior. It is due to the gradual erosion and moral bankruptcy of our time. We see it in film, art, drama, novels, politics and hear it in music; all of which are indicators of who we are at present and what we have become. Hedonism, the pursuit of sensual self-indulgence, and the exclusion of God, paves the way for the flourishing of evil.

How then, do we live in a world such as this? The answer is the spiritual life. To make God the anchor of our souls.

If we learn what temptation is and how to avoid it, it will provide us with the necessary weapons against Satan which he has no power to overcome. On that fateful night in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord instructed his apostles to watch and “pray unless you enter into temptation.” Mark 14:38. They didn’t and gave way to another biblical phrase: “The apostles slept, while Jesus wept.” He said this at the darkest hour in history. Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Church in Ephesus, instructed the Christians there to “put on the whole armor of God: to be girded with truth, wear the breastplate of righteousness, be prepared by the Gospel and carry the shield of faith.” Ephesians 6:11-18. But the armor is not sufficient with out

watchfulness and prayer. Saint Peter's epistle warns us to "be ready and alert because the Devil prowls around looking for souls to devour." 1 Peter 5:8. We cannot do this without the help of God and the spiritual life. We are at war in this life; it is a spiritual war. The church came under attack the day after the resurrection and continues to this day. All Christians are targets.