

Being Catholic Today

Father Laurence Kriegshauser, O.S.B.
fllaurence@priory.org

Third Lecture - **PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this no man has than to lay down his life for his friend. (John 15:12-13)

But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matt 5:44)

As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. (John 6:57)

In my inmost self I dearly love God's Law, but I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law which my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! In short it is I who with my reason serve the law of God, and no less I who serve in my unspiritual self the law of sin. (Rom 7:22-25)

It is long ago now since you broke your yoke, burst your bonds and said, "I will not serve." (Jer 2:20)

The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and it is precisely because the two are so opposed that you do not always carry out your good intentions. (Gal 5:17)

The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. (Matt 26:41)

Because it is weak, flesh easily comes to stand for moral weakness. It is that aspect of a person that is most easily invaded by sin and in which sin most readily establishes a bridge-head... To live "according to the flesh" means to live "in a purely secular way, without reference to God, self-centredly, selfishly." (C. Moule)

To be "in the flesh" means to be turned in upon oneself, to rely on one's own resources to the rejection of the power of God. To be "in the Spirit" means to be open to the pervasive power of God in human life. (D. Harrington)

Insofar as we revere and honor God, our mind is subjected to him, and in this consists its perfection. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae 81, 7)

If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. (Rom 8:13)

He told them a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. (Luke 18:1ff.)

Pray constantly. (1 Thess 5:17).

Put off the old man which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts and...put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me. (Ps 70:2)

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me. (cf. Luke 18:13)

When you notice thoughts arising and accosting you, do not look at them, even if they are not bad; but keeping the mind firmly in the heart, call to Lord Jesus and you will soon sweep away the thoughts and drive out the instigators—the demons—invisibly scorching and flogging them with this Divine Name. Thus teaches John of the Ladder, saying: with the name of Jesus flog the foes, for there is no surer weapon against them, either on earth or in heaven. (Gregory of Sinai in *Philokalia: The Art of Prayer*)

As sticks are thrown into the fire and are unable to resist the power of the fire but are burned up at once, so also the demons, seeking to wage war against the man who has received the Spirit, are burned up and consumed by the divine power of the fire, provided only that the man is always clinging to the Lord and has trust and hope in him. And even if the demons are strong as mighty mountains, they are burned up by prayer, like wax by fire. (Macarius, Homily 43).

As soon as grace notices a trace of self-opinion beginning to appear in a man's thoughts, as soon as it sees that a man begins to think [too] highly of himself, it immediately allows temptations to grow and gain strength against him, until he realizes his weakness, and runs to clutch God in all humility. Thus a man comes to the measure of manhood by perfect faith and trust in the Son of God, and is elevated to love. For the wonderful love of God for man becomes manifest when he finds himself in circumstances which destroy his hope. It is here that God shows his power in saving him. For man can never learn the power of God in ease and freedom.... (Isaac of Nineveh)

Be calm but vigilant, because your enemy the devil is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat. Stand up to him, strong in faith.... (1 Pet 5:8-9)

Finally, grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power. Put God's armor on so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignities and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens. That is why you must rely on God's armor, or you will not be able to put up any resistance when the worst happens, or have enough resources to hold your ground. So stand your ground, with truth buckled round your waist, and integrity for a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the gospel of peace and always carrying the shield of faith so that you can use it to put out the burning arrows of the evil one. And then you must accept salvation from God to be your helmet and receive the word of God from the Spirit to use as a sword. Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. (Eph 6:10-18)

Work out your salvation in fear and trembling. It is God, for his own loving purpose, who puts both the will and the action into you. (Phil 2:12-13)

The sum total of all good actions, the highest of all our works, is perseverance in prayer, through which we can each day acquire all the virtues by asking God for them. Prayer wins for those who are judged worthy, communion with the holiness of God, with the energy of the Holy Spirit, and union of feeling with the mind of the Lord in ineffable love. The person who daily makes the effort to persevere in prayer is consumed by the spiritual love of a divine 'élan' and burning desire for God, and receives the grace of sanctifying perfection. (Macarius, Homily 40)