

## PRECAUTIONS – 13

### *The Third Precaution*

*13. The third precaution, directly against the devil, is that you ever seek with all your heart to **humble** yourself in word and in deed, **rejoicing in the good of others** as if it were your own, desiring **that they be given precedence over you in all things**; and this you should do wholeheartedly. You will **thereby overcome evil with good** [Rom. 12:21], **banish the devil**, and **possess a happy heart**. Try to practice this more with those who least attract you. Realize that if you do not train yourself in this way, you will not attain real charity or make any progress in it.*

St. Peter invites us to humble ourselves in word and in deed, “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (I Pet 5.6). Devil is pride. Jesus has taught us on various occasions to be humble. That is why baptism into Christ’s life, death and resurrection frees the Christian from the domination of devil, principalities, and powers. Still, Christian life remains a war. The Christian must resist and fight Satan through faith, good works, truth, constant prayer, freedom from illusion and a watchfulness based on the knowledge of all pervasiveness of demonic power and influence. Therefore, discernment of spirits remains essential to Christian living. Through discernment we can humble ourselves in word and in deed and eventually that will help us to rejoice in the good of others. When a community member succeeds, we feel we have succeeded; whereas when a community member fails, we feel we have failed.

We are all called to live a genuine mystical life no matter what type of works we do. Mystical life is our right. Of course, Satan tempts both coarsely and more subtly Christians from every walk of life. However, the mystical life seems to dramatize and make more explicit the Christian battle against the enemy of our human nature, the one who will do everything in his power to divert anyone from genuinely asking, finding, and doing God’s will. In addition, even a casual reading of the Christian mystics indicates a less hidden, more emphatic, and intensified confrontation with Satan by those who walk the mystical path. The holy people were ready to give precedence to their neighbors in overcoming evil with good. They humbled themselves and created an atmosphere of love and acceptance. Basically, saints were happy people who made others happy too.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle St. Paul, describing the armor that the Christian must put on for the spiritual combat, especially emphasizes faith as a

defensive arm against the devil: “Put on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces or wickedness on high. Therefore, take up the armor of God...in all things take the shield of faith, with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one” (Eph 6. 6-11).

Faith lifts the soul above the domain of the senses, over which the devil can exercise power, and introduces it into the supernatural world, into which he cannot enter. Here then, the soul is inaccessible to its enemy, and consequently safe from his attacks and blows. When we are humble and compassionate, we possess a happy heart. A happy person will always have a secret weapon against evil. To attain to perfection of charity, we need complete humility, and this attitude will help us to approach any person at any time.

Let us hear in this context what St. James tells us, “know this, my brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.” (Jas 1.19-22). This attitude helps one to banish the devil and possess a happy heart. For the attainment of real charity, one must be ready to banish evil. Happiness makes one to contribute his share selflessly to the community because sharing brings about happiness all the time and to all around.

***Banish the devil and possess a happy heart and ever prefer to be taught by all rather than desire to teach even the least of all.***

St. John affirms very clearly that Satan “establishes himself cautiously at the passageway from sense to spirit” (*Flame* III,64). This is an indication that the evil one tries to take maximum advantage of every situation that is available. Despite our carefulness the devil makes his strongest stand at this point because he cannot enter the person’s innermost core where dwells the Trinity. He will do everything he can to prevent the Christian from entering here to surrender to God’s purifying, illuminating, transforming, and uniting self-communication. To distract a soul from this vital centre Satan may harass the person with bodily pain and a great variety of counterfeited secondary mystical phenomena (*Ascent* II,27,vi). The Christian mystics unanimously teach that the evil one may make use of the person’s lesser centers to concoct tricks, lies, illusions, delusions, and pseudo mystical phenomena in general. That is the main reason why we need to be cautious against the temptations of the devil that subtly invade our life.



## **Live by the Spirit of God**

To counter the attacks of the devil we need help from the Holy Spirit. We can boldly say that to live a healthy spiritual life we need the assistance of the Holy Spirit. When we live by the Spirit of God, everything seems easy and we have the courage to combat the evil one very powerfully until he is defeated. That is why we must be ready *to be taught by all rather than desire to teach*. God loves a cheerful giver because it produces happiness. We advance more surely and effectively by giving ourselves totally to the good despite our defects. Thus, we do more to help others experience conversion and make progress by encouraging them in the positive aspect of their lives than by condemning their errors. Good is more real than evil, and it can overcome evil.

To escape the tricks of Satan, St. Teresa recommends the virtue of humility. This virtue seems to enjoy a sort of immunity to devil's attacks. In fact, it excels in discerning the devil's action and suffers no harm from it. The devil can do little or no harm if the soul is humble. Satan is fixed in an attitude of pride by his revolt against God. He does not know how to be humble nor does he understand humility. All his counterfeits, even counterfeits of humility always bear visible marks of pride. The person who is humble, habituated to the sweet perfume of Christ, promptly detects them by this sign. But the regions in which the humble man lives are not known to the devil. He is ignorant of the reactions of humility; he is always disconcerted and vanquished by it.

## ***Possess a Happy Heart***

We might say that the whole mystery of our redemption in Christ, by his incarnation, his death and resurrection, consists of this marvelous exchange that God has loved us humanly, to render our human hearts capable of loving divinely. God became man so that man might become God and might love as only God is capable of loving, with the purity, intensity, power, tenderness, and inexhaustible patience that belong to divine love. It is an extraordinary source of hope and a great consolation to know that, by virtue of God's grace working in us, the Holy spirit will transform and expand our hearts to the point of one day making them capable of loving God as well as our neighbors as God does all the time. This is what consists our happiness. When we possess a happy heart, the devil does not like it. He tries to trick and make us as unhappy as possible.

How can we possess a happy heart? It is through learning to be happy. We all must prefer to be taught by all rather than desire to teach. When we begin to teach others, we have a very great divine responsibility. One thing we must be aware that the evil we do to or wish to others will end up turning against us. Those who are with a bad

intention are strict with their neighbour will suffer that strictness. Our judgments, mistrust, rejection, or resentment imprison us in a net that will strangle us. Our deepest aspirations for the absolute, the infinite, will be blocked and will remain unfulfilled because of lack of mercy toward one another. This attitude of selfishness can enclose us in a world of darkness and despair. That is why we must be ready to be taught by others rather than we teach them about life and relationships. When we are ready to be taught by others, we can understand that God is teaching us. Jesus tells us to be perfect as his heavenly Father is perfect. The "perfection" he is referring to, is not "perfection" in the keeping of law; but rather "perfection" in expressing genuine love for one another and extending it even to our enemies. "Love" is the definition of God. It is his essence. It is what makes God, God. So, in calling on us to be perfect like his heavenly Father, Jesus is challenging us to model ourselves on the Father's love, and to love as completely and unselfishly as we can. Unfortunately, many people believe that they grow close to God by keeping the law. That is not spirituality. The whole purpose of the commandments, the corporal works of mercy, prayer, reading the bible, meditating, Sunday Mass, pious devotions and so on, is to bring us into a loving relationship with God, our neighbour, and the world we live in. This process of knowing the will of God is what being *ready to be taught by all* rather than desire to teach; that leads us to be happy people.

Here St. John concludes the precaution against the devil. He insists in all these three precautions obedience, humility, and respect and love towards our neighbour. Rejoicing at the good of others plays a vital element in this precaution.

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