

*1 Pe. 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. 10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. 11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

*Eph. 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

*Rev. 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: 2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. 3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne... 13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.*

*Jn. 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

I recall as a new Christian that simultaneously with my new knowledge of God and His glory, came a knowledge of those spiritual powers that are arrayed against Him, and, consequently, against the Church. This revelation was startling to me, for I realized with the hindsight born out of my conversion just how much in the bondage of the devil I had been, and how great my deliverance from his power actually was. From those moments onward, I was never inclined whatsoever to attribute to “prescientific myth” and foolish stories the biblical accounts of Satan and his realm. I knew from experience that one must wisely respect the nature and power of this archenemy of God and not underestimate his reach, while utterly rejecting anything of his agency.

Consideration of this topic is of further assistance to us in our study of the Church, because the devil certainly actively opposes any progress the Church makes whatsoever, and does his best to take advantage of all human foibles to that end, both within and outside the church. This is why St. Peter’s warnings today are so important.

We are called to *sobriety* and *vigilance* in this matter. These are terms one would imagine only in the threat of grave danger. Notice that the devil is represented as *your adversary*. His per-

sonal malice toward God is manifest in his hatred for God's people. Furthermore, he assumes the fiercest of demeanors, in stalking about the world *as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*. He is looking for prey, for that individual or group which is unsuspecting, utterly indifferent to the realities of life in the Spirit, perhaps hypnotized into passivity by the might of irrefutable, rational scientific thought. To suggest that being *devoured* under such a circumstance would be an experience of being violently consumed, like some poor soul in a Roman amphitheater, could be a great mistake. Surely it is true that if one surrenders one's virtues, and lives contrary to the will of God, one is open for anything and everything this adversary might choose to effect. But if this *devouring* took the form of rendering the prey spiritually neutral, how could it have been more completely consumed? How might this happen? Can we guess? Through prayerlessness, surely. Through indifference to the place and position of the Church in the life of the believer. Through the imbibing and acceptance of opinions that refute and discount the Word of God, leaving the believer utterly exposed and dependent upon his own devices. Lions carefully survey the landscape, and their identification of the prey is surely practically instantaneous.

It is instructive that the Apostle has prefaced these comments with others about the grace of humility: *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time...* Humility presses us into the ground, and if we remain there, we will certainly defy the lion's detection! He beholds the landscape, and nothing sticks up to interrupt its flatness and draw his attention.

Although we speak of a *lion* here, we are told anyway to *resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*. Resisting an earthly lion, once he is charging, would seem to be a self-defensive act of little consequence. Who has the physical strength to repel an attacking lion? But the courage of the believer is based upon His confidence in God and His Word, which commands him to *resist*. In doing so, the believer affirms that the effectiveness of his enemy is largely based upon the power of intimidation. The lion believes his roar will be sufficient to destroy the confidence of his prey. In this sense, he is a consummate bully, whose bluff must be called in faith. As with any conflict, once a single skirmish is won, confidence is supplied that can lead to the winning of more.

The last few verses of the Epistle reveal the startling truth that in spite of the nearly free range that the lion seems to enjoy, his movements are carefully monitored by God, who has His own overarching reasons for allowing the conflict. He permits *suffering a while*, after which He promises to *perfect, establish, strengthen, settle* the believer. There is certainly nothing in the immediate, frightening era of mortal conflict that would assure the saint under attack that there is anything salutary in the experience. He hears the roar, sees the teeth, marshals his faith resources, and fights for his life. The *while* he experiences may be a very long one, as we certainly witness

in the example of Job. But the consequence of faithfully enduring these trials is one of extraordinary benefit to the Christian. He will be matured, in every sense. And who doesn't want to grow up, except those who refuse to?

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6 uses a different image for these titanic conflicts with the devil: that of a wrestler, fighting an unseen foe, a battle which requires extensive armor (see vv. 13-17): *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 image here is one of an organized hierarchy of evil which has arrayed itself against God's people. The Church is to *be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might* in response. Again, this is not the language of primitive hyperbole; it is a clear, doctrinal statement about the nature and reality of spiritual conflict, one which the Church has been engaged in since the moment of its inception, and will continue in until Christ's return.

The point I wish to make from all this is to urge us to open our eyes as wide as they can go as to the nature of things for the Church. I suppose it's always possible to stay home from the conflict, and let others fight it out, but this is hardly a position of honor. If there is little progress, those who have opted out ought to look to themselves among the reasons for it. In the end, to borrow the worldly proverb: "No one can fight your battles for you". Not even God will intervene to accomplish those things that He has sovereignly established for us to do.

How might the enemy attack on a local level? We must ask these questions all the time, if we are to truly *be sober, be vigilant*. Through my stubbornness and resistance to change. Through my halfhearted commitment. Through the thoughtless little comments I make. Through my short temper and impatience. Through the tepidness of my devotional life, and the very little time and space that God occupies in my life. Through extensive periods of discouragement.

And in the wider Church? Through its divisions. Through its over-engagement with the world for the sake of reaching it. Through subtle departures from orthodox doctrine and practice. We must remember, that as far as the enemy is concerned, this is a fight to the finish, prosecuted by him with all the desperation of one who knows the final outcome.

Those heroes of the faith who emerge victorious from the battle, those *of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation* (Rev. 5:9), will surely share in St. Peter's words which conclude the Epistle: *To [God] be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*