

WHAT
HAPPENS
WHEN
WE WORK



FOR THE
SACRED
HEART
OF JESUS

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

A few weeks ago, a Marian Father, after cleaning out his bookshelves, donated to our community an interesting array of books. One that has fallen into my hands is the volume entitled *Faustina: The Mystic and her Message* by Polish journalist and historian Ewa Czaczkowska. If you have not read it and are interested in the life of St. Faustina, I highly recommend it. It is quite detailed and, I think, gives you a good picture of the manifold graces Faustina received but also the struggles she endured to respond wholeheartedly to the Lord and her religious commitments.

This month of October, filled with wonderful saints' feast days, especially St. Faustina (October 5th) and St. Margaret Mary (October 16th) gives us many models of holiness who overcame numerous and varied trials along their earthly pilgrimages. Besides these holy ones, we are also commemorating the feasts of the archangels and our guardian angels—those heavenly helpers and protectors provided by our good God. While the Church is loading the liturgical calendar with marvelous examples of angels and saints who assist us along our journey to the Kingdom, the world is flooding our senses with reminders that Halloween is coming. In no uncertain terms, the “prince of this world” is putting before us depictions of goblins, bats, beasts and ghosts. Our spiritual sights are being contaminated by these ghoulish images in an attempt to derail us from thinking about the things of God. Some of you may be well aware of the new programs created by satanic groups that want to introduce children to after-school satan clubs. These “clubs,” of course, are disguised as promoting “benevolence and empathy for everybody,” but in reality are subtle ways to draw youth into pagan practices and demonic influences.

As devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we should be aware that our good works for the Lord, which reap God's blessings upon us and upon others, are going to be attacked by malevolent forces. Anyone who labors for the Lord, who loves the Sacred Heart of Jesus and tries to be his faithful follower can expect to be targeted by agents of ill-will who want to thwart God's works.

Thinking about this spiritual reality, I recalled the story connected with the film *The Passion of the Christ*. Such a powerful presentation of the life of Christ that inspired so many people was bound to disturb the forces of darkness. Sure enough, the creator of the movie's score afterward told of his “battle with satan” as he wrote the music for the film. He says, “I had all these computers and synthesizers in my studio and the hard drives would go down and the digital picture that lives on the computer with the music would just freeze on satan's face. Then the volume would go to ten and it would happen all the time.” After the initial shock, Debney learned to work around this and did not let these antics of satan stop his good work. Everyday, he would say with faith this little prayer, “Lord, if you want me to make it to the finish line, then help me make it to the finish line.”

There is a poignant episode in the life of St. Margaret Mary that is used to illustrate the devil's extreme hatred for her and all she stood for. She tells it like this:

I was sent to help in the infirmary. God alone knows all I had to suffer there, due to my quick, sensitive nature—to say nothing of other people and the devil. It was quite common for the devil to make me fall and break whatever I was carrying. He'd taunt me then, sometimes laughing in my face: “Clumsy one! You'll never be any use!” This left me so sad and miserable, I didn't know what to do; and he'd frequently make it impossible for me to confide in our Mother Superior... Once, when I was carrying a pan of red-hot coals, he pushed me from the top of the stairs. I was quite unscathed when I reached the bottom, and the coals were still in the pan; but those who saw me fall were sure I'd broken my legs. However, I'd been conscious of my guardian angel supporting me.

Occasionally, a photo of these stairs is provided in books about our saint. To see this winding narrow staircase and visualize Saint Margaret Mary tumbling down it, one would easily conclude that it had to be a small miracle that preserved her from harm.

If we consider the life of St. Faustina, we'll find similar incidents of the devil's interference and God's countering action. Take the example of St. Faustina's *Diary*. This piece of writing was the result of a request by her spiritual director Father Michael Sopocko. Having only limited time to discuss Faustina's spiritual state in confession, the priest requested Faustina to write down her spiritual experiences so that he could read them more carefully at his leisure. Shortly after he made this request, Father Sopocko went away for about a month on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the meantime, Faustina had a vision of what appeared to be a heavenly angel who encouraged her to burn what she had written. And she did, probably feeling relief that she was excused from a tedious occupation. When Father Sopocko returned and asked to see her *Diary*, Faustina related that she had burned it at an angel's request. Then she realized that it was not a real angel but the devil in disguise. Father Sopocko told her to start over again. When she did, she skipped over descriptions of her childhood and shifted around some of the material and dates. But what the devil attempted to destroy actually turned out to be a spiritual masterpiece in the end. The Lord rewarded her perseverance with a superior work and crowned it with success for God always wins out in the end.

Another story from the life of St. Faustina shows how the Lord can make good the bad intentions of others who can knowingly or unknowingly disrupt the work of God and make life more difficult for us. One of the assignments that Faustina carried out in her religious life was the job of gardener. She was known to be an expert at it and the produce from her gardens was very important in providing food not only for her community of Sisters but for the girls that they cared for in their institutions. More than once they sent the worst girls as helpers, but Faustina succeeded in having a good influence on them. One particular growing season, she was given too few girls to work in the vast garden they tended. Sister Fabiana, a community member, believed that another sister, Sister Petronela, was taking revenge on Faustina because she was given the garden, while Sister Petronela was assigned to the farm. Sr. Petronela was often heard to say, "Why wasn't Sr. Faustina sent to the farm instead of me?" So she talked another sister into not sending Faustina all the help she needed, so that she wouldn't be able to manage. Also, it was related that Sr. Petronela took a scythe and cut the cabbages right along with some weeds to show that Faustina was doing a bad job. Faustina prayed for this Sister and weeded and tended the remaining cabbages, although little remained. But what was left grew so large that the size of the cabbages astounded the community. Faustina took Sr. Petronela to see them and said, "How good the Lord Jesus is! Have a look, Sister, at how He has blessed me!" Sr. Petronela eventually had a change of heart and later on did not let anyone say anything bad about Sister Faustina.

We would think that in working for the Sacred Heart of Jesus or trying to spread the Divine Mercy message—and these are two very esteemed Catholic devotions—that our endeavors would be free from obstacles and that the good work we are trying to do would be easily accomplished. St. John Vianney, the patron of parish priests who worked closely with many souls, informs us otherwise. He writes:

Whom does the devil pursue most? Perhaps you are thinking that it must be those who are tempted most: these would undoubtedly be the habitual drunkards, the scandalmongers, the immodest and shameless people who wallow in moral filth, and the miser, who hoards in all sorts of ways. No, my dear brethren, no, it is not these people. On the contrary, the devil despises them, or else he holds onto them, lest they not have a long enough time in which to do evil, because the longer they live, the more their bad example will drag souls to hell. So you will ask me, who then are the people most tempted? They are these, my friends, note them carefully. The people most tempted are those who are ready, with the grace to God, to sacrifice everything for the salvation of their poor souls, who renounce all those things which most people eagerly seek. The greatest of all evils is not to be tempted because there are then grounds for believing that the devil looks upon us as his property...

So let us be clear: anyone who is sincerely trying to please the Lord, who works wholeheartedly to spread the messages of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Divine Mercy and other authentic Catholic devotions is going to come up against the powers from below. Anyone who has worked to loosen the allurements of evil in their lives, is going to be tempted back into the darkness. Even the saints experienced this. In the *Autobiography* of St. Margaret Mary she describes for us the tremendous graces she received from the Lord, especially during Holy Communion and at night. But the Lord warned her that satan had asked permission to try her like gold in the crucible of contradictions, humiliations and temptations and to make her feel utterly forsaken. Of the prime temptations that she was to watch out for most of all were those of discouragement and despair.

One of the most effective devices that satan uses to get us to give up on God and stop trusting in his goodness is discouragement. A perceptive spiritual writer used this allegory to describe discouragement: Satan held a sale and offered all the tools of his trade to anyone who would pay the price. They were spread out on the table and each one was labeled—hatred, malice, envy, gossip, lust. Off to one side lay a harmless looking instrument labeled discouragement. It was old and worn looking, but was priced far above the rest. When satan was asked why this was, he replied, "Because I can use this one so much more easily than the others. No one knows that it belongs to me, so with it I can open doors that are bolted tightly against the others. Once I get inside, I can use any tool that suits me best."

Discouragement is a disposition that most of us experience somewhere and sometime along our life's journey. It's when the hurdles we meet along the way seem bigger and loom larger on the horizon than life's opportunities. Our work, our purpose in life may seem meaningless. We feel like we are spinning our wheels and getting nowhere fast. We no longer see the light at the end of the tunnel and hope dims, even vanishes. That's when the devil moves in and changes our discouragement to despair. But the Lord is master even in our trials and can use them to make us stronger. He gives us bigger and better blessings when we endure—*when we don't give up*—and trust in Him. This is the message from the merciful and loving Heart of Jesus. Those who look to Him, who stay by his side no matter what, will reap a bountiful harvest in the end. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on October 2nd, 2016. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, November 6th at 4:00 p.m.