



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of January 1, 2019,
Octave day of the Nativity

Dear Friends,

TODAY, what are the most important needs of the Church? Don't be surprised by our answer, which you may find simplistic, maybe even superstitious or unreal: One of the greatest needs is to defend itself against this evil that we call the demon" (Paul VI, November 15, 1972). Indeed, the devil is not an invention of the Middle Ages, but a "living being, spiritual, perverted, and perverting those who refuse to recognize his existence deviate from the teaching of the Bible and of the Church" (*ibid.*). Among the numerous diabolical interventions told in the lives of the saints, here is one reported by Sulpicius Severus, a disciple of Saint Martin (Fourth Century).

One day, the devil, brilliantly decked out, royally dressed, with a calm face, smiling such that nothing could betray his identity, stood next to the praying Saint Martin. The saint, dazzled by his attire, remained profoundly silent. The demon said, "Open your eyes, Martin, I am Christ; I have decided to come down to earth, and I wished to manifest myself to you." The saint said nothing. The devil went on, "Martin, why do you hesitate to believe what you see? I am Christ." The saint, enlightened from on high, answered him: "JESUS never said He would come dressed in purple and wearing a diadem. As for me, I will only believe that it is Christ if He shows Himself to me in the way that He suffered for me and bearing the stigmata of His Passion." With this, the devil vanished like smoke and filled the cell with an unbearable stench. The narrator adds, "I heard this story directly from the mouth of Saint Martin."

It is your face that I am seeking

What then is the devil's objective? To turn to his own favor the aspiration of man towards his Creator, and to garner for himself the honors due to God alone. Because, as Pope John Paul II reminded the youths gathered at Paris on August 24, 1997, "Man seeks God. The young man understands in his very depths that this seeking is the interior law of his existence. The human being seeks his way in the visible world; and, through the visible world, he seeks the invisible during his spiritual journey. Each of us can repeat the words of the Palmist: *My face hath sought Thee: Thy face, O Lord, will I still seek. Turn not away Thy face from me* (Psalm 26: 8-9). Each of us has his own personal story and carries in himself the desire to see God, a desire that we experience at the same time as we discover the created world." This search for God corresponds to the *raison d'être* of our life here on earth, for "God puts us in the world to know,



Blessed Bartolo Longo

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to love, and to serve Him, and so to come to Paradise" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC, 1721*).

The first commandment prescribes: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind.* This precept "embraces faith, hope, and charity. When we say 'God' we confess a constant, unchangeable being, always the same, faithful and just, without any evil. It follows that we must necessarily accept His words and have complete faith in Him and acknowledge His authority. He is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent

Who could not place all hope in Him? Who could not love Him when contemplating the treasures of goodness and love He has poured out on us?" (*CCC, 2086*).

Man first and foremost acknowledges the sovereignty of his Creator through worship. To worship God is to acknowledge Him as God, as Creator and as Savior, the Lord and Master of all that exists, infinite and merciful Love. The adoration of a unique God frees man from self-absorption, from the slavery of sin and from the idolatry of the world.

JESUS said, quoting *Deuteronomy 6:13: Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Luke 4:8). The worship of the one true God excludes the worship of other gods. Veneration of divinities other than the Unique would be to fall into idolatry. Idolatry does not involve only the false cults of paganism. It remains a permanent temptation against faith. It consists of giving divinity to that which is not God, for example

to demons (satanism), power, pleasure, racism, one's ancestors, the State, money, etc. JESUS said, *You cannot serve God and mammon* (Matt. 6:24). Idolatry cannot be reconciled with a life of grace. Quite often, men, tricked by the Evil One, err in their thinking and substitute lies for the truth of God. They serve the creature rather than the Creator, or even, living and dying without God in this world, they expose themselves to despair and to being lost for eternity.

But the Christian knows that he has within himself the ability to avoid the wiles of the demon. The truths of the Faith enlighten him concerning good and evil. The victory of JESUS, by His Cross and His Resurrection, brings with it the definitive defeat of Satan. It is true that the devil still has an extensive empire here on earth. But as Saint Cæsarius said, "He dominates the lukewarm, the negligent, those who do not really fear God. He is tied up like a dog held in chains, who cannot bite anyone except the person who, feeling a fatal sureness, approaches him too closely. He can bark, he can be solicitous, but as for biting he certainly cannot do that unless one wants to be bitten."

The grace of God allows man to participate in the victory of Christ and gives him the power to conquer demons. In order to offer us support in this conviction, Pope John Paul II beatified Bartolo Longo on October 26, 1980, "the man of the Virgin," who had been enslaved by Satan for several months.

The Ten Commandments less one

In 1841 near Brindisi, in southern Italy, a child was born who received at Baptism the name of Bartholomew, or Bartolo for short. His last name was Longo. Early on he showed himself to be intelligent, pious and sparkling with life. He said, "I was a lively and impertinent little devil, something of a scamp." He was a student in a religious school until the age of 16. At school, he was punished a lot for his childishness, and it was a torture for him to have to stay in his seat during class! On the other hand, on the day of his First Communion, he was motionless for an hour and a half in thanksgiving! Endowed with an amazing memory, at the age of sixteen, Bartolo began the study of law at the University of Naples where he was quite successful.

At the same time, he took a philosophy course given by a fallen-away priest. Blindsided by the anticlerical spirit, he slowly left the sacraments and stopped praying. A question haunted him: "Was Christ God or not?" Someone who knew of his spiritual torment sent him an invitation: "Come with me. I will take you to a place where all of your doubts will be put to rest." So, on May 29, 1864, he was initiated into the secrets of magnetism and spiritism: turning tables, responses and divination by clairvoyants. Bartolo asked "the spirit": "Is JESUS Christ God?" –"Yes," the medium answered. –"Are the precepts of the Ten Commandments true?"

–"Yes, except the sixth" (*Thou shalt not commit adultery*). –"Which of the two religions is the true one: Catholicism or Protestantism?" –"Both are false," the spirit pronounced sententiously.

Bartolo was on the way to losing the faith. Instead of listening to the voice of the truth that comes to us from Christ and the Church, he let himself be duped by the demon himself, who knows how to mix up truth and falsehood in order to mislead souls and lead them into sin. The rejection of the sixth commandment led the young man into every excess of immorality, while doubt about the truth of Catholicism led him to indifference concerning religion. Seduced by magic, Bartolo got into divination and spiritism; he became a medium of the first order, and even a "spirit priest."

Exclusive worship

Divination claims to predict the future based on signs drawn from the world of nature, or with the help of particular methods or arts. It is a mixture of astrology (claiming to predict the future of men by the heavenly bodies and the alignment of the stars), cartomancy (prediction of the future using cards), chiromancy (palm reading), etc. The worst and most serious expression of divination is necromancy or spiritism, that is, consultation of the spirits of the dead in order to be in contact with them and to foretell the future.

The Christian cannot admit that his life is dominated by occult forces which can be willfully manipulated by magic rites or that his future is written in advance in the movements of the stars or other forms of soothsaying. "God can reveal the future to His prophets or to other saints. Still, a sound Christian attitude consists in putting oneself confidently into the hands of Providence for whatever concerns the future, and giving up all unhealthy curiosity about it" (CCC, 2115).

"All forms of *divination* are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums, all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone" (CCC, 2116).

The baptized person refuses all magical practices which are contrary to the faith in God the Creator and to the exclusive worship which is due to Him. These practices are opposed to the recognition of JESUS CHRIST as unique Redeemer of mankind and of the world, and to the gift of His Spirit. They are a danger to eternal salvation. "All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others—even if this were for the sake of restoring their health—are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. Recourse

to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity" (CCC, 2117).

In the same way, esoteric and occultist groups, whether old or recent in origin (Theosophy, New Age, etc.), claim to "open a door" to permit knowledge of hidden truths and the acquisition of special spiritual powers. They give rise to great confusion in the minds of men, especially the young, and lead to seriously damaging behavior from a Christian point of view. In the place of seeking out God and the sacramental life, they introduce systems of thought and of living which are totally incompatible with the truth of the Faith.

Seeking out extraordinary phenomena, such as clairvoyance, "travel" in the hereafter or the production of "fluid," can also be a danger to correct human balance and to the authentic life of Faith. He who has discovered JESUS Christ has no need to seek for salvation elsewhere. "As soon as God gave us His Son, who is His Word, there was no additional word to give to us" (Saint John of the Cross). To believe in JESUS, to listen to His word and follow His example, in communion with all of the Church, is the road to follow without letting oneself wander into false concepts and vain behavior (cf. *Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Tuscany on Magic and Demonology*, April 15, 1994).

Piercing the mystery

Bartolo, who became rapidly exhausted by the prolonged fasts that the demon demanded of him and by every sort of hallucinatory phenomenon, became ill. He would write: "The evil spirit who assisted me, wanted to take hold of my soul, which had been shaped by piety from my earliest years; he wanted blind worship and obedience from me. He passed himself off as the archangel Michael, and made me recite the psalms and perform rigorous fasts. He demanded that his name be written at the head of all my papers and that I carry it over my heart, inscribed in red letters in a triangle of parchment, as a sign of power and protection."

But for the time being the young man, disturbed by the supernatural and the hereafter, was still impelled by his desire to pierce the mystery of the other world. In fact, no one can totally avoid asking himself about the enigma of life and death. Pope John Paul II has said, "Man comes into the world, born from the maternal bosom, grows and matures; he discovers his vocation and develops his personality over the course of the years; then comes the moment when he must quit this world. The longer his life is, the more man feels his own fragility, the more he asks himself the question about immortality: What is there beyond death?" (Paris, August 24, 1997).

But Bartolo's guardian angel was watching over him. The angel arranged that he meet an old friend, Professor

Vincenzo Pepe, whom he respected and admired. After being brought up-to-date on Bartolo's spiritistic practices, he advised him to repent and to confess. He asked him: "Do you really want to die in an insane asylum and be damned on top of that?" The question struck home. Pope Paul VI said: "We speak rarely and only a little about the last ends (death, judgment, Hell, Paradise). But the Second Vatican Council reminds us of these solemn truths that concern us, including the awesome truth of possible eternal punishment that we call Hell, of which Christ spoke without reserve (cf. *Matt.* 22:13; 25:41). It is enough to make one tremble. Let us listen to the prophetic voice of Saint Paul: *With fear and trembling work out your salvation* (*Phil.* 2:12). The seriousness and the uncertainty surrounding our final end has always been an important object of meditation and a source of unparalleled energy for morality and sanctity in Christian life" (September 8 and April 28, 1971). Strengthened by the words of Professor Pepe, Bartolo went to the confessional of Father Radente.

Confronted with this bizarre individual, whose face was decorated with a musketeer's beard, the priest at first believed he was dealing with a mugger who was going to attack him! But when after quite a bit of hesitation, the young man approached and spoke to him, the priest was able to find the words that removed the blinders from the eyes of his penitent. The confession was sincere and profound. Later, Bartolo avowed to those who did not believe in the action of the devil in spiritism: "I experienced it, and it is only due to a miracle of the Most Blessed Virgin that I was delivered from it." A new life, in the service of the Blessed Virgin, began for him. He began each day by reciting the Rosary, a prayer to which he was faithful until the end of his life. Bartolo became a Third Order Dominican, under the name of "Fratel Rosario" (Brother Rosary). He was thirty-one years old. Under the direction of Father Radente, he began to study the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

A shower of miracles

During this time, he continued to practice law. But his weakened health no longer permitted him to work regularly. Charitable persons were worried about him. The Countess Marianna de Fusco, recently widowed, invited him to come to her home to become the preceptor for her children. She possessed, adjacent to the ruins of ancient Pompeii, near Naples, property which she was not able to keep up. To help her, "Fratel Rosario" offered to administer the property. He then realized the frightful spiritual and material misery of this region. What could be done in the face of so many needs? He began by founding a Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary; he traveled the countryside, going to farms to teach the people how to pray, distributing medals and rosaries. Little by little, the practice of religion returned. Then, on the advice of the bishop, he built a church consecrated to MARY. He placed above the main altar a picture of the Blessed Virgin which soon

began to produce a shower of miracles. Leo XIII would say: "God used this image to provide innumerable graces which moved the universe."

"Towards the ideal of civilization"

Ex-votos of thanks and charitable alms arrived with the flow of pilgrims to the new sanctuary. Bartolo took advantage of this in order to found an orphanage for girls and the children of prisoners, thereby assuring them an upbringing, work and religious instruction. Three years after this foundation, he wrote to the criminologists of the time, according to whom the children of criminals would most certainly also become criminals themselves: "You, what have you done by taking Christ out of the schools? You have produced enemies of social order, subversives. On the contrary, what have we gained by putting Christ into the schools of the children of criminals? We have transformed these unfortunate ones into honest and virtuous young people that you wanted to abandon to their sad fate or toss into insane asylums!"

Pope Saint Pius X wrote: "There is no true civilization without moral civilization and no true moral civilization without the true religion. If we wish to arrive at the pinnacle of well-being for society and for each of its members through brotherhood, or, as they also say, by universal solidarity, it is necessary to have a union of minds in truth, union of wills in morality, union of hearts in the love of God and His Son, JESUS CHRIST. But this union can only be realized through Catholic charity, which alone can lead people in the step of progress towards the ideal of civilization" (*Letter on "le Sillon,"* August 25, 1910).

Meanwhile, the collaboration of Bartolo with the Countess of Fusco caused tongues to wag and drew a

veritable campaign of lies about them. They consulted Leo XIII who answered them thus: "Get married. And nobody will have anything more to say about it." So, on April 19, 1885, Master Bartholomew Longo married the Countess of Fusco. They observed complete chastity in their married state, in imitation of MARY and Joseph, which nevertheless did not prevent the two spouses from loving one another deeply in God. Thanks to them, the work of Pompeii continued and spread. Soon there were some thirty homes built around the sanctuary, then a hospital, a printing press, a train station, an observatory, a post-office, etc. The former misery was replaced by a working prosperity. The person who formerly had tried to initiate Bartolo into spiritism cried out one day, "We really must call it a miracle."

To die peacefully

But the roses were not without thorns. In 1905, the Countess's oldest son was having business difficulties to the point of bankruptcy. A complaint was made to Pope Saint Pius X: "The offerings for Mass end up in the pockets of Mrs. Bartholomew Longo's son." In order to take care of this gloomy business, entirely made-up, Bartolo immediately turned over all of his works to the Holy See. He said to the Pope, "Holy Father, may I now die in peace?" The Pope answered, "Oh, no, you must not die, you must work, Bartolo nostro!" So, in obedience he worked until he exhausted the last drop of his strength.

Bartolo's final days were spent in retreat and prayer. Ill with double pneumonia, he passed away on October 5, 1926, at the age of forty-six. The Most Blessed Virgin welcomed the soul of her faithful servant: "My only desire is to see MARY who saved me and who will save me from the clutches of Satan." Such were his last words.

"Rosary in hand, Blessed Bartolo Longo says to each of us: 'Awaken your confidence in the Most Blessed Virgin of the Rosary. Venerable Holy Mother, in You I rest all my troubles, all my trust and all my hope!'" (Beatification Homily).

We pray for you and all of your loved ones, living and deceased, in the New Year.

*Dom Antoine Marie
o.s.b.*

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