

Don Bosco: An Incessant Fighter against the Devil

“Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty powers. Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil”: Thus wrote Paul to the Ephesians. Christian life is an incessant warfare. We had been in this battle since the beginning of creation. But, we find ourselves getting clobbered. Why?

We are followers of Jesus Christ who, by His death and resurrection disarmed the evil one. But, if Satan is disarmed, why are we still getting hammered? Why so much evil and sufferings in the world? The war is not yet over. It is left to us who know Christ to stand against the Devil. Often we begin this warfare with enthusiasm. But, invariably we are beaten and become incapacitated.

Spiritual scholars give three main reasons for our defeat in the battle. The first reason is our lack of knowledge of the enemy. Secondly, it may be because of our ignorance regarding the means or weapons available for us. Thirdly, we lack the courage to go on the offensive, which is inevitable if we wish to win this battle.

All that we need to tackle these reasons is an efficient master who himself fought this battle and became victorious. Let us give heed to Don Bosco, Our father and founder under whose guidance we can equip ourselves in order to fight our infernal enemy, the Devil. Let us implement his efficient strategy and thus ensure that in this battle we will be the last men standing.

Once, nearing the end of his life, Don Bosco was spending some time chatting with Fr. Berto regarding the future of his work and oratory. The subject of the conversation gradually drifted to the bereavement of Don Bosco. Fr. Berto began to speak at length about the widespread mourning that would follow the death of the saintly priest. Don Bosco listened attentively. With the usual smile on his face, the old priest replied in his feeble voice, “At my death, people will say: “Poor man! He too is gone.”” There the matter will end. But, the devil will be glad and snicker with glee: “The one who fought me so hard and often spoiled my attempts has finally disappeared.

Don Bosco was indeed a poor priest. According to his biographers, he lacked the 19th century dignity. He clothed poorly and wore a pair of workman’s boots contrary to the apparels proper to the clergy. But, what made him special was the fact that beneath his disheveled priestly attire, he was clad in the full armor of God, which enabled him to wage an

endless war against the devil; which strengthened him to save numerous souls from perdition; which made the devil tremble at his sight.

The first strategy: know the enemy.

In the little House of Becchi, under the able guidance of Mamma Margaret, John was able to develop within himself a deep sense of evil. He was well aware that the devil was constantly at work in his life and that of his fellowmen. Yet, he didn't sit idle, but set out to work. By constant prayer and acquisition of knowledge he outran the devil. John was not willing to give the devil even a glimpse of the victory. The little boy snatched from the grip of the evil one his companions and neighbor. The work of the devil seemed to be incorrigible as John was undergoing moments of indecision regarding his vocation. The devil foresaw the great havoc that would be brought about on him if the peasant boy became a minister of God. Yet the boy did not succumb to his plans, but fought him back. Thus, the devil helplessly witnessed the beginning of his defeat on 5 June 1841 when John received the sacrament of priestly ordination and resolved to bear hunger, thirst and suffer for the salvation of souls.

To everyone who wishes to stand against the wiles of the devil, Don Bosco gives his first strategy: Know the enemy. To know him, the first thing we ought to do is to believe that he is real. Many a time, we fall into sin, because we prefer to believe that devil does not exist. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen states thus: "Very few people believe in the Devil these days, which suits him very well. The devil has little problem with those who believe that he is not real. He is going around, circulation the news of his own death. Often wee to become victims of this malicious plan of the deceiver. He gradually gets hold of us and destroys us. Our fall begins the moment we think that we are infallible.

Don Bosco once admonished a boy who said that he neither feared nor believed in the devil. The Priest said, "Quiet! Do not say so, you don't know the power he possesses if he is allowed to use it. Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation 'Gaudete Exultate' exhorts the faithful to think of the devil as a personal being who assails us. Therefore, as we enter into the battlefield to fight our enemy, let us not give heed to those who say that Devil is a pseudo-reality and hell is a fairy tale, because he is out there seeking for an opportunity to devour us.

The second strategy: recognize the attacks of the enemy.

Don Bosco was a grandmaster who foresaw the attacks of the devil. It was as if the priest had spent eons, watching the game of the deceiver. Consequently, the devil found himself running short of moves.

Soon after his priestly ordination, Don Bosco set out to work, because he saw the evil one successfully keeping possession of young souls across the city of Turin. Don Bosco realized that the primary move of the devil was getting grip over those who were lazy. This prompted him to equip the boys with variety of activities. He promoted games and recreation primarily to chase out the deceiver. “While playing”, He used to say, “The devil has no chance to harm you no matter how hard he tries.” The implementation of trades, theatres and classes too aimed at this goal. These efficient tools made the boys stay awake and the devil was compelled to stay away. Within the walls one could constantly hear Don Bosco exhorting his sons: “Dear children! The devilish lantern must be smashed into pieces.”

The boys did just as they were instructed.

The boys who had been struggling in the grip of the devil found refuge in Don Bosco. The devil witnessed with rage and disappointment, thousands of the climbing the stairs to holiness.

Therefore, having implemented the first strategy to know the enemy, Don Bosco asks us to become aware of our own areas of weakness; because it is there that the Devil would launch his attack.

The third and the most important strategy that Don Bosco implemented was to muster up courage and fight him. In order to defeat him, Don Bosco gathered precise knowledge regarding his weaknesses.

On 11 February, Don Bosco had a mysterious dream. He found himself at the courtyard of the oratory. Looking around, he saw the devil standing at a corner, watching the boys play. Petrified by the sight, Don Bosco dashed to him in order to chase him out.

“What are you doing”, He asked the devil, “Have you not decided to leave my boys alone?” The devil replied, “Why should I bother your boys here? I have marvelous substitutes here- a group of pupils who work faithfully for me.”

The devil then took Don Bosco to the sacristy where a priest was hearing confessions. He said, “Some do not like me. But, many others serve my interests by confessing the same sins and making promises and breaking them.” Don Bosco was grief-stricken. He asked, “Who are your worst enemies”. “Those who go to communion”, came the reply. “What do you fear the most?” “Devotion to Mary and.....”The devil stopped abruptly. Don Bosco commanded him to speak out. Hesitantly the latter replied, “what hurts me most is carrying out the resolutions made in confession.”

Devotion to Mary, reception of the Holy Communion and the sacrament of reconciliation are the three weapons by which Don Bosco was able to win over the enemy.

These are the same ones that we ought to use when we met the devil face to face. He is deeply wounded when we stand against him holding fast to these three lethal weapons.

Thus this courageous saint exhorts us to believe in the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He constantly reminds us, "Keeping oneself away from the Holy Communion is same as throwing oneself into the arms of the Devil." He assures us that We will be able to find in our Blessed Mother a powerful protector: "At you side", he says, "Stands a beautiful lady stretching forth a hand to each of us. You will not fall if you hold it." Keep this in mind and the victory will surely be ours.

Maria Sophetti, a woman who was diabolically possessed said thus about Don Bosco: "The presence of this priest maddens me. The torments that I endure in his presence are more severe than when I am before other priests." This is the testimony of the devil himself who trembled at the sight of Don Bosco. However, the devil was not willing to leave him alone. He tried to destroy every plan of the saintly priest. Don Bosco was constantly attacked by the Devil. But he was not willing to give up. He rose up each time and struck the enemy even harder. The devil indeed feared him.

As we have resolved too folly Jesus in the path laid by Don Bosco, Let us be sure that we will always be in the radar of the evil one. Let us accept the fact that he will leave no stone unturned to see our fall. But as don Bosco did, let us trust in the lord and put on the full armor of God and strike him as hard as we can. In this battle, we have no time to rest for Don Bosco himself said, "How can I rest when the devil is constantly trying to destroy human souls?" With this firm conviction, let us enter the arena to wage war against our infernal enemy, so that as we live or lives as committed Salesians, Don Bosco may look down from heaven and repeat the same words that he enunciated on 17 september, 1876 on the occasion of the first profession of a batch of novices: "Right now, I am happy as an army general, seeing my sons increase, Soldiers who want to fight the devil; soldiers who will help me destroy, as much as we can, his kingdom on earth and prepare a new place for themselves in heaven."

Let us give word to this loving father of ours, that we won't let the devil snicker with glee at his absence on earth, instead continue to stand against the deceiver as Don Bosco did.

Thank You.

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