

RCIA Lesson 4 – The Universal Co-Redemption



**"Think often of the Blessed Virgin with love. Those who have received the grace to do so, possess a great sign for predestination."
- Saint Ambrose (340 - 397)**

"Prayer is powerful beyond limits when we turn to the Immaculata who is queen even of God's heart." - Saint Maximilian Kolbe (1894 - 1941)

"Let us not imagine that we obscure the glory of the Son by the great praise we lavish on His Mother. The more Mary is honoured, the greater is the glory of her Son." - Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 -1153)

"Whoever bears the mark of devotion to Mary, God recognizes as His own."- Saint Alphonsus Liguori. (1696 - 1787)

" The Mother of God contained the infinite God under her Heart, the God Whom no space can contain. Through her, the Trinity is adored, demons are vanquished, Satan is cast out of heaven, and our fallen nature is assumed into heaven." - St Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)

"Those who enjoy the favour of Mary are recognized by the citizens of heaven. And those that bear her stamp , that is, those that have the grace to be her servants, are inscribed in the Book of Life. " - Saint Bonaventure (1221 - 1274)

"The Blessed Virgin Mary is called the Star of the Sea. Those who sail the ocean seas are guided to the port they seek by carefully observing the stars. In the same way, Christians are guided to heavenly glory by keeping their eyes on Mary."- St Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274)

" While remaining the mother of our Judge, Mary is a mother to us, full of mercy. She constitutes our protection. She keeps us close to Christ, and she faithfully takes the matter of our salvation into her charge." Saint Peter Canisius (1521 - 1597)

Christian Stories – from the Catechist

64. Mother and Child.—“What?” replied a mother to her young child, who was saying she had never received anything from God: “you have never received anything from God? Who made the grass to grow and the corn to ripen? Who made the trees to blossom and then produce fruit? Who made the flowers to bloom? Who is it that makes the rains to fall on the earth, and the sun to shine and ripen everything? Is it not God who has done this, and all for us? What a proof of His goodness to you and to everyone! Oh! we can never thank Him sufficiently for them!”—Power.

65. “Who made the Devil?” “Who created the angels?” was the question one day asked of some children. The answer was easy: God. But who made the devil? There was the difficulty! They thought, reflected, and thought again, when suddenly one exclaimed: “God created him an angel, and he made himself a devil.”—Catéchisme en Exemples.

66. The Demon of Alexandria.—A solitary was transported in spirit into a monastery where there dwelt over three hundred monks. He saw an immense number of devils following the religious everywhere—to the garden, refectory, and especially the Church—seeming to push and pull them about and distract them in every way, to lead them into sin. The anchorite was then transported to Alexandria, but found there only one devil seated by the city gate apparently with nothing to do. In his doubts as to the meaning of this, an angel gave him to understand that the devils are numerous and busy in monasteries, because there they find resistance: whereas, in the city, one was sufficient, people in the world being naturally prone to evil, and too careless to resist.—Rodriguez.

70. S. Frances and her Angel.—S. Frances was often permitted to see her angel guardian, and to him she had recourse in all her trials. When Satan came to tempt her, the angel looked on her with affection and strengthened her against him. Did she fall into any fault, a sadness overspread his countenance; but when she repented, he reappeared full of joy and gladness: thus he was in her a source of spiritual force.—Her Life.

71. S. Agnes not Afraid.—When S. Agnes refused to offer sacrifice to the idols, the judge threatened to have her taken to a house of sin. She only smiled and said: “If you knew the power of the God I serve, you would never threaten me thus: He has given me an angel to protect me!” When the judge’s son went up to insult her, her angel struck him dead at her feet.—Her Life.

72. Never Angry.—Asked how it was he was never angry, but always bright and gay, a hermit replied: “I always remember the presence of my good angel, who whispers to me what to say and do, and notes down the manner in which I do all things: this thought fills me with respect for him, and thus I am enabled to avoid whatever may displease him.”—Lives of the Fathers.

73. S. Wenceslaus and the Angel.—Prince Ladislav having rebelled against King Wenceslaus, and being on the point of piercing him through with his sword, saw by the side of his king, an angel, who said: “Strike not.” Full of fear, the prince fell upon his knees, begging pardon from the Saint.—Catechisme en Exemples.

74. “Holy Angel, pray for Her!”—In a small village in the Tyrol, a joiner was piling up some wood to a considerable height, when suddenly the whole mass of timber topples over, burying under its ruins his little daughter, some three years of age. The parents’ first words were: “Holy angel of our child, pray for her!” They hastened to remove the wood, with every precaution, fully expecting to find their child bruised to death, but imagine their joy and gratitude, on finding their little girl had not even received a scratch.—Catholic Anecdotes.

LESSON 4

Creation and the Angels

35. What do we mean when we say that God is the Creator of heaven and earth?

When we say that God is the Creator of heaven and earth we mean that He made all things from nothing by His almighty power.

- (a) Only God can create, that is, make something from nothing, because creation requires infinite power, which God alone possesses.
- (b) All things except God depend on a cause for their existence and hence must have been created by God.^{4 4} (Read the first book of the Bible, Genesis, which describes the creation of the universe.)
- (c) God did not have to create the world; He did so freely.
- (d) God preserves all creatures; otherwise, they would at once return to nothingness. He also governs all things, and in the divine government of the world nothing does or can happen unless God wills or permits it.
- (e) Evil is the lack of some perfection. God does not will physical evil in itself but only insofar as it is connected with some good.
- (f) God wills or permits the physical evils of life in order to punish sin, to make sinners repent, to try the just and make them worthy of everlasting reward, or to be the occasion of some other greater good.
- (g) God permits but does not will moral evils.

SCRIPTURE: "Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and thy maker from the womb: I am the Lord, that make all things, that alone stretch out the heavens, that establish the earth. And there is none with me" (Isaias 44:24). "For in him were created all things in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers. All things have been created through and unto him, and he is before all creatures, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17).

36. Which are the chief creatures of God?

The chief creatures of God are angels and men.

- (a) It is a matter of faith that God the Creator produced out of nothing creatures both spiritual and corporal, angelic and earthly. ^{5 5} (Fourth Lateran and Vatican Councils.)

SCRIPTURE: See Daniel 3:57ff. See also Scripture, question 35, Colossians 1:16-17.

37. What are angels?

Angels are created spirits, without bodies, having understanding and free will.

- (a) Reason alone cannot prove that the angels exist. Reason indicates that, just as there are purely material creatures and creatures composed of both matter and spirit, so also it is fitting that there should be purely spiritual creatures.
- (b) Angels are spiritual beings inferior to God and superior to man.

(c) Sacred Scripture frequently speaks of the angels and mentions three by name: the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.^{6 6} (Michael—Daniel 10:13-21; Jude 1:9; Apocalypse 12:7; Gabriel—Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19-26; Raphael—Tobias 3:25; 5:17; 6:16; 8:3; 9:6; 11:7; and 12:15)

(d) The nine “choirs” of angels are the Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. ^{7 7} (Seraphim—Isaias 6:2; Cherubim—Genesis 3:24; Ezechiel 10:1-22; Ecclesiasticus 49:10; Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, Powers—Colossians 1:16; Virtues—Ephesians 1:21; Archangel—I Thessalonians 4:16; Angel—Matthew 18:10)

(e) The exact number of angels is unknown, but Sacred Scripture indicates that their number is very great.

SCRIPTURE: “Thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him” (Daniel 7:10) “Or dost thou suppose that I cannot entreat my Father, and he will even now furnish me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent for service, for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). “Rash and self-willed, such men in their deriding do not regard majesty; whereas angels, though greater in strength and power, do not bring against themselves an abusive charge” (II Peter 2:11).

38. What gifts did God bestow on the angels when He created them?

When God created the angels He bestowed on them great wisdom, power, and holiness.

(a) God bestowed upon the angels supernatural grace by which they could gain eternal happiness.

(b) The angels were given the opportunity to merit the reward of heaven by remaining faithful to God.

39. Did all the angels remain faithful to God?

Not all the angels remained faithful to God; some of them sinned.

(a) We do not know the exact nature of the test to which God put the angels that they might prove themselves worthy of eternal happiness.

(b) The angels who were unfaithful committed a serious sin, for which they were punished.

SCRIPTURE: “For God did not spare the angels when they sinned but dragged them down by infernal ropes to Tartarus, and delivered them to be tortured and kept in custody for judgment” (II Peter 2:4). “And the angels also who did not preserve their original state, but forsook their abode, he has kept in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

40. What happened to the angels who remained faithful to God?

The angels who remained faithful to God entered into the eternal happiness of heaven, and these are called good angels.

SCRIPTURE: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). 41. What do the good angels do in heaven? In heaven the good angels see, love, and adore God. SCRIPTURE: See Scripture, question 40.

42. How do the good angels help us?

The good angels help us by praying for us, by acting as messengers from God to us, and by serving as our guardian angels.

(a) The Old and the New Testament refer frequently to the work of the good angels among men. A good angel was the guide of God's chosen people (Exodus 23:20); the protector of Tobias was a good angel (Tobias 5 ff). The Archangel Gabriel announced the glad tidings of the Incarnation to Our Blessed Mother (Luke 1:28).

(b) Although angels are pure spirits, they can be seen by man when on special occasions God permits them to take on bodies or the appearance of bodies, which are visible to the human eye. SCRIPTURE: "For to his angels he has given thee in trust, to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Psalm 90:11-12). "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And when the angel had come to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women'" (Luke 1:26-28).

43. How do our guardian angels help us?

Our guardian angels help us by praying for us, by protecting us from harm, and by inspiring us to do good.

(a) It is a matter of faith that angels are deputed as the guardians of men.

(b) It is commonly held that each individual has a special guardian angel.

SCRIPTURE: "When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, and hide the dead by day in thy house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord For I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord" (Tobias 12:12,15).

44. What happened to the angels who did not remain faithful to God?

The angels who did not remain faithful to God were cast into hell, and these are called bad angels, or devils. (a) The devils, or the evil spirits, were created by God, not as bad beings but as good beings. By their own free acts, they chose evil and thereby became bad angels.

SCRIPTURE: "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

45. What is the chief way in which the bad angels try to harm us?

The chief way in which the bad angels try to harm us is by tempting us to sin.

(a) Devils are sometimes permitted to enter the body of a man and to exercise power over his faculties—a state known as diabolical possession; or they are permitted to torment a person from without—a state known as diabolical obsession.

(b) Diabolic possession and obsession are permitted by God to show forth His glory, to punish sin, to bring sinners to repentance, or to give occasion for the exercise of virtue.

(c) When the devil uses the body of a possessed person to say or do evil things, the person is not guilty of sin, provided he does not freely consent.

(d) Exorcism is the act of driving out or warding off evil spirits from persons, places, or things possessed or infested by them. The Church received from Christ the power of exorcism.

(e) An exorcist is one who has power, conferred by a bishop, to exorcise demons. The order of exorcist is the third of the four minor orders of the Western Church. Only with the permission of his bishop is a priest allowed to use his power of exorcising evil spirits.

SCRIPTURE: "Then having summoned his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out" (Matthew 10:1). "Put on the Armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). "Be sober, be watchful! For your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same suffering befalls your brethren all over the world" (I Peter 5:8-9).

46. Do all temptations come from the bad angels?

Some temptations come from the bad angels; but other temptations come from ourselves and from the persons and things about us. (a) The bad angels, the persons and things about us, and we ourselves can excite the senses and be an inducement to sin.

SCRIPTURE: "For I am delighted with the law of God according to the inner man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members" (Romans 7:22-23). "Let no man say when he is tempted, that he is tempted by God; for God is no tempter to evil, and he himself tempts no one. But everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion" (James 1:13-14). "Do not love the world, or the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15).

47. Can we always resist temptations?

We can always resist temptations, because no temptation can force us into sin, and because God will always help us if we ask Him.

(a) God does not demand the impossible; however He warns us that in our efforts to overcome temptation we must not rely entirely on ourselves but must seek His help.

(b) God permits us to be tempted in order to make us realize our weakness, to test our faith, and to help us by His grace to strengthen virtue by practice and to obtain the reward of eternal life.

(c) The most effective means of overcoming temptation are prayer, mortification, frequent Confession and Holy Communion, and avoiding idleness and the near occasion of sin.

SCRIPTURE: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. May no temptation take hold of you but such as man is equal to. God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:12-13). "And he has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee' " (II Corinthians 12:9).

IMPORTANT TRUTHS ABOUT CREATION AND THE ANGELS

One of the usual names for God is “Creator.” Both reason and revelation assure us that everything outside of God has been created, or brought into existence from nothingness by His almighty power. Moreover, after He has created something, God continues to keep it in existence; this is called divine conservation. In the first chapter of the Bible we read that in the beginning God created heaven and earth; and then the Sacred Scripture tells us that in the course of six days God made the various elements of the universe—the sun and moon and stars, the plants and the animals, and finally man. These six “days” need not be understood as days of twenty-four hours each—they may each have been periods of many thousands of years in duration.

Before He created men, God created another class of intellectual beings, known as angels—spirits without bodies, endowed with great perfections, particularly with profound intelligence. God wished the angels to share His supernatural happiness in heaven, but He wished them first to merit this privilege by their own free actions. Hence, while He raised the angels to the supernatural order by giving them sanctifying grace, God did not admit them at once to the beatific vision but imposed on them a test of their fidelity. Many of the angels were faithful to God; as a reward they were admitted immediately to the everlasting joys of heaven. Their leader was St. Michael. Others, led by Lucifer, who is now called Satan or Beelzebub, in their wilful pride rebelled against God. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian, taught that the wicked angels committed sin either by rejecting the supernatural happiness to which God called them because they were satisfied with their own natural perfections, or by desiring to attain to supernatural happiness by their natural powers. Those sinful angels were cast into hell for all eternity and are now called devils.

The good angels, who praise and enjoy God in heaven, are employed by Him in the service of mankind. Many passages of Scripture record that God’s designs for the human race were carried out through the ministry of angels. This was especially the case in connection with the Incarnation. The angel Gabriel announced to our Lady that she was to be the Mother of the divine Redeemer; angels proclaimed His birth to the shepherds on the first Christmas night; an angel warned St. Joseph of Herod’s murderous plan and bade him take the Child and His Mother into Egypt, and later informed him of Herod’s death and commanded the Holy Family to return; angels ministered to Our Lord after His threefold temptation by the devil; an angel comforted Him during His agony in the garden; angels announced His Resurrection and His Ascension into heaven.

In His goodness, God protects us by the ministry of angels. It is commonly believed that each individual has a special guardian angel, although it is not taught by the Church as an article of faith. Our angel guardian accompanies us from birth until death, praying for us in a special way, inspiring us with good thoughts, striving to protect us from dangers of body and of soul. On October 2nd the Church celebrates a feast in honour of the Guardian Angels. There are also three feasts in the course of the year to honour the three angels whose names we know from the Sacred Scripture—St. Michael (September 29th), St. Gabriel (March 24th), and St. Raphael (October 24th). There is also a feast on May 8th to honour an extraordinary apparition of St. Michael.

God allows the devils to tempt human beings by working on their imagination. Sometimes the devil is permitted by God to attack a human being more directly by obsession (from without) or by possession (from within the body). Sometimes very holy persons were tormented in this way. The devil can never force a person to commit sin; God will always give us sufficient grace to resist temptation.

RESOLUTION: Resolve to think of your guardian angel at least once a day, either in your morning or in your night prayers. Thank him for his protection, ask him to continue his loving care for you, so that one day you may be with him in heaven.

Creation and the Angels How did creation begin?

Sometimes a dress designer or a pastry cook or a perfume manufacturer will boast of a “new creation.” When they do so, they are using the word “creation” in a very loose way. No matter how fresh a new style of dress may be, it began with a fabric of some kind. No matter how delectable a dessert, or how delightful a fragrance may be, they began with some kind of ingredients.

To “create” means to “make out of nothing.” Only God, whose power is infinite, can do that. Accurately speaking, only God can create. When God creates he has no need of materials or tools to work with. He simply wills that a thing should be—and there it is. “Let there be light,” said God in the beginning, “and there was light.... Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters,” said God, “and so it was” (Gen 1:3, 6).

Not only is it God’s creative will that has brought all things into existence, it is God’s will also that keeps them in existence. If God were to withdraw his sustaining will from any of his creatures, that very instant the creature would cease to exist; it would fall back into the nothingness from which it came.

The earliest works of God’s creation which are known to us (he hasn’t necessarily told us everything) are the angels. An angel is a spirit—that is, a being with an intelligence and a will, but without a body, without any dependence at all upon matter. The human soul, too, is a spirit, but the human soul will not be an angel, even during the time after death when it is separated from the body, awaiting the resurrection. The human soul was made to be united to a physical body. We say that the soul has an “affinity” for its body. A human person, composed of body and soul, is not complete without the body. We may talk more of that when we come to discuss the resurrection of the body. At the moment we wish only to emphasize that an angel is a complete person without a body or need for a body, and that an angel is a being far superior to a human being.

Nowadays there is much fanciful talk about “men from Mars.” These supposed inhabitants of our neighbouring planet usually are represented as being much more intelligent and powerful than we earth-bound mortals. But even the most ingenious writer of science fiction could never do justice to the breath-taking beauty, the surpassing intelligence, and the tremendous power of an angel.

If this is true of the lowest order of the angelic host—the angels properly so-called— what shall we say of the ascending orders of pure spirits who are above the angels? They are identified for us in the Bible as archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubim and seraphim. It is quite possible that an archangel is as much above an angel in perfections as an angel is above man.

Actually, of course, we know little about the angels, about their inner nature or the degree of distinction between them. We do not even know how many of them there are, although the Bible indicates their number is very great: “Thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him,” says the Book of Daniel (7:10).

Only three of the angels have been named for us: Gabriel (“Hero of God”), Michael (“Who is like God”), and Raphael (“God hath healed”). With regard to the angels, it almost seems that God has been content to give us a quick peek into the marvels and the magnificence that await us in the world beyond time and space. Like the lines of perspective which in a painting draw attention to the picture’s central theme, so do the rising choirs of pure spirits draw our vision irresistibly to the supreme Majesty who is God—to God whose infinite perfection is immeasurably beyond that of even the exalted seraphim.

And this, let us remember, is not a world of fantasy and imagination that we are talking about. It is a world far more real than the planet Mars, more substantial even than the sod we tread. Best of all, it is a world to which we can go without benefit of interplanetary spaceships. It is a world to which we shall go if we wish.

When God made the angels, he made each with a will that was supremely free. We know that the price of heaven is love for God. It is by making an act of love for God that a spirit, whether an angel or a human soul, fits itself for heaven. The love must be proved in the only way in which love for God can be proved—by a free and voluntary submission of the created will to God, by what we commonly call an “act of obedience” or an “act of loyalty.”

God made the angels with free wills so they might be capable of making their act of love, their choice of God. Only after they had done so would they see God face to face; only then would they enter into that everlasting union with God which we call “heaven.”

God has not made known to us the nature of the test to which the angels were put. Many theologians think that God gave the angels a preview of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race, and commanded that they adore him... Jesus Christ in all his humiliations, a babe in the manger, a criminal on a cross. According to this theory, some of the angels rebelled at the prospect that they would have to adore God in the guise of a man. Conscious of their own spiritual magnificence, their beauty and their dignity, they could not bring themselves to the act of submission that adoration of Jesus Christ would demand of them. Under the leadership of one of the most gifted of all the angels, Lucifer (“Lightbearer”), the sin of pride turned many of the angels away from God, and there rang through heaven the awful cry, “We shall not serve!”

And thus hell began. Because hell is, essentially, the eternal separation of a spirit from Almighty God. Later on, when the human race would sin in the person of Adam, God would give the human race a second chance. But there was no second chance for the sinning angels. Because of the perfect clarity of their angelic minds and the unhampered freedom of their angelic wills, even the infinite mercy of God could find no excuse for the sin of the angels. They understood (to a degree that Adam never did) what the full consequence of their sin would be. With them there was no “temptation,” in the sense in which we ordinarily understand the word. Theirs was what we would call a cold-blooded sin. By their deliberate and fully aware rejection of God, their wills fixed against God, fixed forever. For them there was no turning back; they did not want to turn back. Their choice was made for eternity. There burns in them an everlasting hatred for God and all his works.

We do not know how many angels sinned; this is another point upon which God has not chosen to inform us. From references made to them in the Bible, we infer that the fallen angels (or “devils,” as we commonly call them) are numerous. But it seems more probable that the great majority of the heavenly host remained faithful to God, made their act of submission to God, and are with God in heaven.

Frequently the devils are referred to as “Satan.” Satan is a Hebrew word which means “adversary.” The devils are, of course, the adversary, the enemy of mankind. In their undying hatred for God, it is natural that they should hate God’s creature, man. Their hatred is even more understandable in the light of the belief that God created the human race precisely to replace the angels who sinned—to fill the gap in heaven left by their defection.

When they sinned, the fallen angels lost none of their natural endowments. The devils possess a keenness of intellect and a power over nature such as is unknown to mere man. All their cleverness and power are directed now toward keeping from heaven the souls which are destined for that

place. The efforts of the devils are ceaselessly directed toward leading humans into their own path of rebellion against God. In other words, we say that the devils tempt us to commit sin.

We do not know exactly the limit of their power. We do not know how much control they have over nature, how much they may be able to steer the course of natural events so as to bring us up against a temptation—the point at which we must make a decision between God’s will and our own will. We do know that the devil can never force us to commit sin. He cannot get inside the human soul and manipulate it to suit himself. He cannot destroy our freedom of choice. He cannot, so to speak, make us say “yes” when we really want to say “no.” But he is an adversary healthily to be feared and respected.

Is the devil real?

Someone has said that even the worst sinner spends more time doing things that are good and harmless than in doing things that are bad. In other words, there is some good even in the worst of us.

That is what makes it so hard for us to really understand the true nature of devils. The fallen angels are pure spirits without bodies. They are completely immaterial. When they set their wills against God by their act of rebellion, they embraced evil (which is rejection of God) with their entire nature. A devil is 100 percent evil, 100 percent hatred, without even the faintest pinpoint of good anywhere in his being.

Not the least of the horrors of hell will be the soul’s constant and inescapable association with these spirits whose unrelieved malice is a living and an active force. In this life we are uncomfortable and unhappy if we find ourselves even briefly in the company of a manifestly evil person. We hardly can bear to think what it would be like to be linked for all eternity with a living depravity whose completeness and driving force are immeasurably beyond those of the most corrupt human.

We can hardly bear to think of it—but we should do so, at least occasionally. Our great present danger from the devil is that we may let ourselves forget that he is a living and active force in the world. An even greater danger is that we may let ourselves be influenced by the intellectual pride of unbelievers. Reading “clever” books and listening to “smart” people who patronizingly assume that the devil is a “medieval superstition” long since outgrown, we may unconsciously begin to think of the devil as a figure of speech, as an abstract symbol of evil without real existence.

And that would be a fatal mistake. Nothing would suit the devil better than to have us forget about him, or ignore him—above all, stop believing in him. An enemy whose presence is unsuspected, who can strike from ambush, is a doubly dangerous enemy. The devil’s chances of victory increase in proportion to the blindness and the overconfidence of his victim.

What God has made, he does not unmake. What God has given, he does not take back. Having given the angels intelligence and powers of a high order, God did not revoke those gifts, not even from the angels who sinned. If a mere human can tempt us to sin: if a fellow worker can say, “Come on, Joe, let’s go out tonight and hit the hot spots”; and if a neighbour woman can say, “Here is something I wish you’d try, Mary—you owe it to yourself not to have another baby for a while”—then certainly the devil can set before us temptations much more devious and much less obvious.

But the devil cannot make us sin. There is no power on earth or in hell that can make us sin. We still have our free will. It still remains with us to make the choice—and no one can force that choice upon us. Joe can say “no!” to the fellow worker who wants to paint the town red; Mary can say “no!” to the neighbour who recommends the contraceptive. And the temptations that the devil may place in

our path, however enticing they be, can be just as firmly rejected. There can be no sin unless and until our will freely turns from God, and chooses a lesser good in preference to God. No one, ever, can truthfully say, "I sinned because I couldn't help it."

Not all temptations come from the devil, of course. Many temptations come from the world around us—even from our very friends and acquaintances, such as those mentioned above. Temptations can come also from the deep-seated forces within us which we call passions, passions that often are rebellious and imperfectly controlled as a result of original sin. But from whatever source the temptation may come, we know that we can conquer it if we have the will to do so.

God does not demand the impossible from anyone. He would not demand of us unyielding love and absolute loyalty unless it were possible for us to give them. Now, should we be troubled or frightened by the fact that we are tempted? It is by conquering temptation that we acquire merit before God. It is through temptation, met and defeated, that we grow in holiness. There would be little credit in being good if it were easy to be good. The great saints were not men and women who had no temptations; in most cases, they were men and women who had tremendous temptations—and became saints by their victories.

We shall not, of course, win our battles by ourselves. We must have God's help to reinforce our weakened wills. "Without me you can do nothing," Jesus tells us. His help, his grace, is available to us in limitless abundance if we want it, if we seek it. Frequent confession, frequent Holy Communion and prayer (particularly in time of temptation) will make us strong against any temptation—provided we do our part.

We have no right to expect God to do it all. Unless we avoid unnecessary danger, unless we avoid those circumstances, so far as we can—those people, places and things that might entice us to sin—then we are not doing our part. If we go looking for danger, God's hands are tied. We have choked off grace at its very source.

Sometimes it is said of a person whose life or actions are particularly evil, "He must be possessed by the devil!" In most cases the words "possessed by the devil" are not meant literally; they simply indicate an abnormal degree of malice.

But there is such a thing as being possessed by the devil, really and literally. As we have pointed out previously, the full extent of the devil's power over the created universe, including mankind, is unknown to us. We do know that the devil can do nothing unless God permits. Yet we also know that God, having set his creative plan in motion, does not normally take back (either from the angels or from humans) any of the powers he originally bestowed.

In any case, both the Bible and human history, as well as the continuing experience of the Church, make it very plain that diabolical possession does happen. Diabolical possession means that the devil enters into the body of a person and takes control of that person's physical activities: his speech, his movements, his actions. But the devil cannot take over control of the person's soul; the freedom of the human soul remains inviolate, and not all the demons of hell can force it. During diabolical possession a person loses control over his own physical actions to a stronger power—the power of the devil. What the body does is being done by the devil, not by the person himself.

There is another form of influence which the devil may exert. This is called diabolical obsession. In this case, the devil attacks a person from without rather than from within. He may pick the person up and dash him to the ground; cast him out of bed; torment him with hideous noises and other

manifestations. St John Vianney, the beloved Curé of Ars, was one who suffered much from this type of demoniac influence.

Both diabolical possession and obsession are rarely encountered nowadays in Christian lands; it seems that Christ's redeeming blood has shackled Satan's power. But they still do occur in pagan lands, as missionaries frequently testify; although not so noticeably as before Christ's redeeming Sacrifice.

The religious rite by which the devil is cast out of a person possessed or obsessed is called exorcism. In the ritual of the Church there is a special ceremony for this purpose, in which the mystical body of Christ calls upon the name and the power of her head, Jesus himself, to break Satan's hold upon a person. The office of exorcist belongs to every priest, but it may not be officially exercised except with special permission from the bishop, and then only after careful investigation has established that it really is a case of possession and not just mental illness.

There is, of course, nothing to prevent a priest from using his power of exorcism in a private, unofficial capacity. On a railroad train, for example, a priest listened unhappily to a torrent of blasphemy and profanity from the man in the seat ahead. Finally the priest said silently, "I command you, Satan, in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, to go back to hell and leave this man alone!" The blasphemous language stopped at once.

Another time the same priest spoke a similar private exorcism in the presence of a married couple who were quarrelling bitterly—and immediately their anger subsided. The devil often is present and at work, even outside the extreme case of possession and obsession.

We have talked at considerable length about the fallen angels only because of the grave danger involved should we take lightly their presence or their power. (God defend us from the devil's own most subtle trap—that is, ignoring his existence because it happens to be intellectually unfashionable to believe in him.) It seems much easier and much pleasanter to believe in the reality of the good angels; and of course their power for good is much greater than Satan's power for evil.

The angels who remained faithful to God are now with him in heaven, engaged in the eternal love and adoration of God which one day (we pray) will be our lot also. Their will now is God's will. Like our Blessed Mother and the saints, the angels are intensely interested in our welfare, in seeing us come safely to heaven. They pray for us, as do the saints. They use their angelic power (whose extent again is unknown to us) to aid those who want and will accept their aid.

That the angels do help us is a matter of faith. If we do not believe that, we do not believe the Church, nor do we believe the Bible. That each of us has an individual guardian angel is not a matter of faith, but it is the commonly held belief of all Catholics. "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life" (St Basil). And as we honour God by our devotion to his friends and heroes, the saints, we shall make a great mistake if we fail to honour and to invoke his earlier masterpieces, the angels who people heaven and protect earth.

Ave Maria Lesson 4 Concluded

