

## THE DEVIL—1 PETER 5:6-11

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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“Be sober and keep watch. Your enemy, the devil, is going about like a roaring lion in search of someone to devour. Resist him. Stand firm in the faith.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no reason to doubt that all of you here today believe in the existence of the devil. But do you believe in the actual presence of the devil everywhere that you go? He doesn't reside in some distant corner of the cosmos, watching us from a distance as if on a remote video link. He doesn't send out his temptations to us from his “office” in Hell. And the devil is certainly not a ridiculous little horned imp dressed in red leotards that sits on our shoulder whispering little temptations into our ear.

No. The devil is not only real. He is present at this very moment, here among us “going about like a roaring lion.” He is in our midst because he hates Christ and he hates us because we are here to adore Christ. He is prowling about here in our midst at this very moment looking for a way to distract us from our worship, looking for some weakness in us that will divert us from God. Unfortunately, because we too often don't think of the devil's actual presence at our side, he can more easily catch us off guard.

To understand why St. Peter described the devil as a roaring lion prowling about in search of someone to devour, consider the context in which he was writing. St. Peter spent many years in Rome and was surely familiar with the games in the Coliseum in which wild animals were turned loose upon helpless persons thrown into the arena. The lions had been starved so that they'd be very hungry. Turned loose into the arena, they prowled back and forth roaring as they sized up their prey. The helpless victims were trapped. They had nowhere to go. They were at the total mercy of the lions, who they knew would shortly devour them. We, in a sense, are no different. We live in this world and are as confined to it as the victims were in the Coliseum. The devil prowls about the world seeking victims and we can't escape, just as there was no way out of the Coliseum.

In the Bible the devil is called the “prince of this world.”<sup>2</sup> Sacred Scripture tells us that the entire world is under his dominion and influence along with the other evil spirits.<sup>3</sup> The Apostle John wrote: “The whole world lies under the power of the evil one.”<sup>4</sup>

Satan's action in the world consists primarily in tempting men to evil, by influencing their minds and imagination in order to turn them away from God. As an angel, a pure spiritual being, he is far more powerful and intelligent than humans. He distorts attitudes and circumstances and tries to influence our free will. He looks for our weak points and strikes us there. He tries to transplant within man his own attitude of rivalry, insubordination and opposition to God<sup>5</sup> enticing us into thinking that sin is good. He convinces us that the lie that we want to tell or the gossipy conversation we want to engage in, or that pornographic website, isn't really that bad.

We don't normally do things willingly that make us feel bad. But the devil convinces us that some action or some thought is for our good or will make us feel better. Think about it. Sin feels good or we wouldn't commit it. Therefore, Satan attempts to draw people into his own radical rejection of God by making bad look good, just as he did with Adam and Eve. They committed the sin of disobedience and pride because they became convinced that eating the fruit was for their own good. And we have to remember

that he even tried to tempt Christ in His human nature by trying to convince Christ that his propositions would be good for Him, that it would feel good. After all, after fasting for forty days, what's the harm in turning a few stones into bread?

But probably one of the most insidious tactics of the devil is his skill in convincing people that he doesn't exist, so that his influence can conceal itself in a more effective manner. This is what we see on a very broad scale in our own age. Because the devil had convinced so many people to believe that he doesn't exist, he has been able to convince them that the moral absolutes given to us by God also don't exist. He is the author of relativism, making it appear that much of what is evil is not really evil at all. And by convincing people that he doesn't exist, he has also succeeded in convincing many people that God doesn't exist either.

But even with those of us who still believe in his existence he has often managed to influence even our thinking and attitudes in the most subtle manner. For instance, you may accept the fact of his existence, yet not always recognize his very real presence in everything you do and everywhere you go, waiting ready to trip you. Satan is pure spirit, not limited by either space or time, but his presence is nonetheless very real, even if we aren't aware of it. He never sleeps.

Pope John Paul II once said that the world is "the theater of a never-ending battle being waged for our dignity and identity as free, spiritual beings."<sup>6</sup> The concept of a "battle" necessarily implies the existence of combatants on two opposing sides, who are fighting for the subordination or destruction of the other. So few today realize that we are in the midst of an enormous cosmic battle with an enemy bent upon our spiritual destruction. We are relentlessly under attack by Satan and his demons, who are ever-present in the world. They are spirits who need no sleep or rest, so they prowl about the world without ceasing, seeking the ruin of our souls.

On Tuesday evening, the 12<sup>th</sup> of May, 1981, Pope John Paul II prayed *Compline*, the last hour of the Divine Office, as he did every evening during his entire priesthood. And the Divine Office for Tuesday's *Compline* has the very same passage from the First Letter of St. Peter that we heard today: "Be sober and keep watch. Your enemy, the devil, is going about like a roaring lion in search of someone to devour."<sup>7</sup>

And so it was! The next day, during John Paul's regular Wednesday audience in St. Peter's Square, Mehmet Ali Agca, the Devil's accomplice, who was roaming about the square like a roaring lion in search of prey, emerged from the crowd and attempted to kill the Holy Father. What John Paul II had read the previous evening was to happen the following day. The devil hated John Paul II and he was prowling about St. Peter's Square like a roaring lion ready to devour him.

The devil also hates us. He hates us because we are followers of Christ. He hates us because we are here to worship God. He is real and he is here at this moment, prowling about looking for victims. But resist him. Stand firm in the faith.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 5:6-11.

<sup>2</sup> John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, "On the Devil," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 1986.

<sup>4</sup> John 5:19.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, "On the Devil," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 1986.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Homily delivered during a Mass at Cherry Creek Park.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 5:6-11.