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The Fourth Sunday of the Year (B)

The Apostle Paul says to us, "I should like you to be free of anxieties" (I Corinthians 7:32). Surely we all want to live in this way. Indeed, we pray for this at every Mass: "In your mercy keep us free from sin," we beg the Lord, "and protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ."¹

How are we to live in this way? The Psalmist gives us the answer: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Psalm 95:8). If we desire a life free of anxieties - if we want a life of joy, peace and fulfillment - we must listen to the voice of the Lord. It is he who has fashioned us and knit us together within our mother's womb (cf. Psalm 139:19). It is he who knows the deepest desires of our heart and how best to satisfy them. We must not harden our hearts to his will, but rather seek his will with all sincerity and devotion.

We need only look around to see that a great rebellion is currently taking place, and has been taking place for millennia. I speak not of a political rebellion, but of a moral one, a rebellion of the heart and mind.

¹ *Roman Missal*, 125.

Before the foundation of the world, Lucifer, the most beautiful of the angels, rebelled against the divine plan of salvation. Refusing to serve God by serving man, Lucifer, and a third of the angels with him, was cast out of heaven by the Archangel Michael and his host (cf. Revelation 12:7-9). He who was to be the bearer of light became the bearer of darkness because he refused to listen to - to obey - the voice of God. It was Lucifer who said, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14).

When the Prince of the Heavenly Host opposed Lucifer and his minions, he fought him with the weapon of his own name. His name, Michael, means, "Who is like God?" Lucifer answered Michael's question, saying, "I am. I am like God." Because of his arrogance and pride Lucifer was thrust down from heaven; he answered wrongly.

Adam and Eve, too, our first parents, rebelled against the will of the Lord in their desire to be like gods (cf. Genesis 3:5). When that cunning serpent tricked them he convinced Adam and Eve that God did not want them to be like himself even though they he made them in his own image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26). They answered Michael's question with Lucifer's answer and so were thrown out of Paradise. They refused to accept their creaturely status and failed to see the great love

of the Creator, the love revealed in his holy will for each person.

There is something more that Lucifer, Adam and Eve share in common: in their rebellion against God they thought they would find freedom and happiness. But now, Lucifer's only happiness can be found in leading men and women further along the destructive road of sin and death. Can this really be happiness? Of course not! Now Lucifer answers for his rebellion, as the Lord says: "Whoever will not listen to my words..., I myself will make him answer for it (cf. Deuteronomy 18:19). It is because, as they say, misery loves company that he sends his angels - his demons - to ensnare mankind, just as they ensnared the man in the synagogue in Capernaum.

And what of Adam and Eve? Where is their happiness found? Where is our happiness found? It is found only in God, in God whom they - and we - rejected. What a pitiful state we were in until the Lord, in the fullness of time, fulfilled the promise he made to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18).

This Messiah whom the Lord raised up is not simply another prophet, but God himself: the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:14). In his coming among us we see signs of a new

rebellion, a rebellion against this first one, and one that is far stronger and which will, ultimately, triumph over it.

That unclean spirit brought the man into the synagogue to challenge Jesus. The demon demanded of his Creator, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us" (Mark 1:24)? Jesus, the "Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24), has come not to destroy us, but to answer the cry of the Psalmist: "Save us, Lord our God, and gather us together from the nations, that we may proclaim your holy name and glory in your praise" (Psalm 105:42).

Jesus answers the demon's rebuke with words of great power: "Quiet! Come out of him" (Mark 1:25)! In Greek, he commanded the unclean spirit, *ἰλπτκωλῆ* (*phimotheti*), literally, "Be muzzled!" The demon obeys, but not without one last fight. The demon cannot but obey the command of the Lord God, of him who comes with power, of him whose very word has the force of action (cf. Isaiah 40:10).

Do we not, too, rebel against the Lord? Whenever we choose our will over God's, whenever we refuse to love as he loved us, we do indeed rebel against him. Sin is the rebellion against God, however great or small it may be. We think our way will lead to happiness and satisfaction, but it never does. Only the will of the Lord provides us with what we seek, for he made us and knows the deepest desires of our heart.

Why do we rebel against him? It can only be because we have not recognized his authority; and because we do not accept his authority, we do not listen to him. Without listening to him, we cannot know his love.

In the final analysis, we must consider whether it is worth listening to the Lord and, if it is, why we should listen to him. The people of Capernaum recognized in Jesus' words "a new teaching with authority" (Mark 1:27).

Jesus' power over evil shows its demise; his word accomplishes what he says. The long reign of darkness is ended because in Christ Jesus, "the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light; on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen" (Matthew 4:16). The power of Satan is broken, though his influence remains until the Lord comes in glory.

It once was common to invoke the intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel and many today are flying again to him seeking his protection. Fr. Thomas Euteneuer, the president of Human Life International, is calling Catholics to take up again the beloved Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel after every Mass.

He is asking this prayer to be prayed "with the intention of respect for human life from conception to natural death and the conversion of abortionists" and to help combat the forces of

darkness presently at work in the world.² It is a worthy and powerful prayer, first composed by Pope Leo XIII, and one that Msgr. Enlow has asked us to take it up again here at the end of every Mass.

The Christian life is a spiritual battle and Saint Paul tells us: "we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). Let us, then, take up this prayer and ask the Lord to give us the protection of Saint Michael.

As we pray this prayer, may the Prince of the Heavenly Host address his name to us, "Who is like God?" and, following his example may we answer rightly and recognize the authority of him who is the author of life and submit to him in humility and love. Let us seek to do not our will, but his. Amen.

² Fr. Thomas J. Euteneuer, Letter for the St. Michael Prayer Campaign for the Conversion of Abortionists. Available at http://www.hli.org/st_michael_prayer.html.