

# The Truth about the Devil

by

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## **Influence of the Evil Spirit**

The influence of evil spirits in human affairs is far greater than most men are willing to admit. Although God has created all things to His own glory, the “Evil One” exerts all his tremendous powers to frustrate this plan of God by claiming creatures for himself. The almighty God does not stop the “Evil One” any more than He stops a human being from committing murder or any other sin. God triumphs over the malice of the devil by turning evil into good. Adam and Eve sinned in Paradise through the influence of Satan. God did not prevent this sin, but provided a Redeemer who assumed human nature and elevated it above the Angelic Choirs – so much so that the Angels adore the Humanity of Christ. Indeed, God turned this great evil into a greater good. “Ubi abundavit delictum, superabundavit gratia.” (Rom. V. 20)

The Holy Scriptures clearly depict this influence of the Spirit of Darkness in the beginning of the human race. This same influence of evil intervenes in the life of every human being. God created man to His own image, and claims as His own all who bear this stamp of God’s likeness. The devil strives to destroy this “likeness to God” in the human soul by inducing man to sin, and thereby substituting his own likeness. God does not prevent this activity any more than He prevented the fall of Adam. God rules every soul by love; the devil seeks to rule by hate, destruction of grace, and frustration of God’s mercy. As God never changes, so also the devil never changes; he always was and always will be the enemy of God, the hater of souls, the father of lies and deceit, and the one through whom death has entered the world.

The foregoing is nothing new. No one denies it, but it is also true that few apply it in practical life. As a general rule the sinner will acknowledge the sin, admit his guilt, but will deny all influence of the devil. This denial does not make him more learned; on the contrary, to his own detriment, he fails to understand the entire issue. It would be as though one acknowledged and treated an illness, but neglected to consider the cause of the sickness. In human affairs we both cure the disease and prevent its recurrence. The children of light in their spiritual world should use the same prudence, and both acknowledge sin and recognize its evil instigator. When a sinner at the point of death refuses to be reconciled with God, it is not St. Michael who hardens his heart, but it is the enemy of God and of souls. Exclude the enemy and the hardened sinner will turn to God, with tears and contrition.

## **Story of the Hardened Sinner**

The following story is an illustration of this. In a certain Illinois city a man lay dying of cancer of the throat which doctors had pronounced as incurable, and had declared that death would follow soon. The good sisters of the hospital in which he was a patient had tried in vain to have him go to confession, sending priest after priest to speak to him.

Each priest was treated in the same way. As soon as he would mention confession the sick man simply turned to the wall, saying that there were other sick who wanted to confess their sins, but that it was a waste of time for the priest to talk to him about it,

because he did not want to go to confession. The continual insistence of the priests and sisters so angered him that he left the hospital. After a few weeks another hemorrhage occurred, and the family in haste and desperation again sent for a priest, hoping against hope that he would not die without the Sacraments. Two priests of the parish had visited him previously without success, so this time a priest who had had some experience with a number of cases of exorcism went to the sick man. As usual he turned to the wall. The exorcist stood at the foot of the bed and ordered the devil: "I command you, evil spirit, in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, to depart, I command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Crucified to leave this room so that this soul will return to its God and Creator."

These words were said secretly. The sick man turned and said, "I do not know how to confess." The answer of the priest was: "I will help you. I will ask you questions, you merely answer yes or no." Once the confession was begun the sick man broke into tears, and made a most humble and contrite confession. The priest then hurried back to the Church and brought him Viaticum. Meanwhile, in the rectory, a spirited debate was in progress among the other fathers. Some maintained that the man was a hardened sinner who would never give in even to the point of death; while others maintained that the exorcist would drive out the devils and make it possible for the sick man to confess. They even made bets on the outcome ... those who had greater faith collected. The next morning the poor man died.

### **The Devil Interferes with Parish Projects**

Another illustration of the power of the devils to hinder a good work, and the power of exorcism to render them helpless:

A certain priest in North Dakota was trying to introduce Perpetual Adoration into his parish, so that at no time during day or night would the Prisoner of the Tabernacle be alone and unattended. His efforts aroused a storm of objections and criticism. Certain prominent members of the parish objected strenuously to the practice, and loudly claimed that the parish had existed for many years without it, that it was something unheard of, that no other parish practiced it, that the pastor should try to get the careless Catholics to practice their religion with a fair degree of regularity, and leave all that extra-ordinary piety to the cloistered nuns (who did nothing anyway) and had plenty of time for new and strange devotions.

The following Sunday the pastor announced to his people before the sermon that he was going to read a special blessing for them, composed by Pope Leo XIII as an antidote against the powers of evil. He asked them to kneel down and join with him in prayer that the powers of evil be diminished, and that the blessing would extend to their homes, their farms, places of business, to the members of their families and to their relatives and friends. He then read the Leonine Exorcism from the *Rituale Romanum*.

Immediately after Mass several of those same men who had opposed the introduction of the practice of Adoration into the parish pledged themselves to make hours of adoration,

and use their influence with the members of their families to do the same. All opposition to the practice of Adoration immediately disappeared. It is evident that the objections were overcome by eliminating the objector.

## **Open Rebellion**

Another example of a very practical value of the official prayers of the Church against the devil is the following: A certain young lady told her pastor that she had a very normal desire to marry, that she wanted to have a home and a family as other women had, but that she could not hold any young man, that she seemed to repel rather than attract them. She told of her past experience and admitted that her life was far from being exemplary. The pastor told her that she was rebelling against the will of God, and taking her salvation into her own frail hands, that it was necessary for her to submit to God, that she was trying to live her own life and not the life which God was pointing out to her.

She replied: "I have prayed to God, I have made novenas, I even have fasted, and God has no right to deprive me of this human happiness. If God refuses to hear my prayers for a husband I will never submit to Him, I will hate Him eternally." The pastor excused himself for a moment and returned with the ritual and holy water. The girl was asked to kneel down before him, and he recited "The Exorcism." After this was done the girl seemed to be entirely different. With tears of contrition she recited a formula of submission suggested by the pastor, and promised that she would repeat it daily.

The strong diabolical influence in this case, and effectiveness of the exorcism, is evident. If you are anxious to save souls of obstinate sinners, recite the exorcisms over them. The power of the devil will be broken and they surely will be converted.

## **Priestly Powers**

To curb the influence of Satan, Christ has given priests necessary powers – the powers of exorcism, but in our days they are buried deep in the ground for fear that sometime they may be used. The servant who buried his talent in the parable of the gospel was called a "wicked and slothful servant" by the Master, and he ordered him to be cast into "the Darkness outside where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Every priest is an exorcist by virtue of his ordination. This power must be used, and used very extensively, with firmness and authority, otherwise the enemy creates havoc among the sheep of God, unmolested even by those who have the duty and the obligation to guard the flock of Christ. Priests should exclude the infernal wolves, not by meekly begging them to depart, but by a firm command. "I command you to depart in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified." The Church does not ordain priests with the power of forgiving sins only, but she gives them the power to exclude the assassin who is the cause of all sin. The civil government maintains a police force and the Church of God also has the authority to cast into the abyss even the princes and powers of hell who are the prime perpetrators of crime against God.

## **The Priest Should Not Fear**

Good priests should not fear to undertake an exorcism – and by good priests is meant those who habitually live in a state of grace. It is not required that the exorcist be a saint worthy of canonization, or even close to it. If a priest can stand at the altar and offer the Most Holy Sacrifice with a clear conscience, he can also be a successful exorcist. This work is a spiritual one, and Christ stands ready to help whenever our strength falls short. “Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Luke X, 19.

## **Valuable Experience**

Exorcisms are uplifting and instructive. One exorcism brings us closer to God, and fills our lives with more spirituality than many retreats. One exorcism will teach us more about the devil and his machinations than can be learned from many books.

## **Fasting**

Fasting is necessary. During my own exorcisms I observe a “black fast” (total abstinence from food and drink) for three days, then eat normally for a period of three days, and so on during the entire exorcism. My experience with these fasts is that the first day is the hardest, the second not so hard, and since the fast ends on the third day at 3:00 PM, it is bearable. For those who have no experience with total abstinence from both food and drink for such long periods, I would suggest that they fast for a period of 24 hours only, then eat normally the following day, and fast again on the third day – and so on. Without fasting it is impossible to drive out the devils.

## **The Stole**

A stole about ten feet long should be prepared, one long enough so that it may be tied around the neck of the possessed person and still be long enough to be worn by the exorcist. One end of the stole should be tied around the neck of the person exorcised after the prayer: “Omnipotens Domine, Verbum Dei Patris, etc.” has been recited.

The prayers of exorcism begin with the Litany of All the Saints, after which are recited the prayers contained in the Roman Ritual in the section entitled “RITUS EXORCIZANDI OBSESSOS A DAEMONIO,” and they should be continued without interruption for at least two hours at a time. From eight to ten hours each day should be devoted to the work of exorcising, until the evil spirits have been expelled. The physical condition of the exorcist and the afflicted one should always be considered. Prudence is the best guide.

The psalms which follow the rite of exorcism may be omitted and that time devoted to the recitation of the direct prayers contained in the formula itself. The leonine exorcism, which begins with the prayers of St. Michael, may be recited with the longer formula.



Once the exorcism has been started it should continue until the possessing evil spirits have been driven out. This may be a matter of hours or days, or of weeks or months; but the length of time is not so important as the fact of expulsion. The exorcist must command the demon to indicate the day and the hour of his departure, and what sign he will give when going out. Generally the demon repeats his name three times before leaving. The exorcist must never place too much reliance on any statement or promise of the demons, but should continue the prayers of exorcism even if the signs of departure have been given, to eliminate the possibility of deception. The devils are liars. They will tell the exorcist that they will not resist any longer, and that they are ready to leave. They will mention their names three times as agreed, the possessed person will appear normal, but all this is often only a maneuver of the devil to deceive the exorcist. For this reason, even after the signs of liberation have been given, the exorcisms should be continued for two or three days. If the devil did not leave he will not be able to remain hidden under the ordeal of exorcism for such a length of time.

### **The Relief Obtained in Certain Cases**

Some possessed persons can hardly be liberated, others will never be completely freed; but even in these cases the exorcism will bring relief. The exorcist should never be discouraged, because even in cases where the afflicted one is never completely freed, great battles are fought against the enemy of God, and his powers are weakened. Such exorcisms might be compared to “delaying actions” in warfare, which are never accompanied by victory, but nevertheless serve an essential purpose in the general plan of battle. It is quite possible and in fact it often happens that relieved persons again become possessed. Such possession cases should be treated the same as any other case of possession.

### **Causes of Possession**

The question: “What causes possession,” is often asked, but it cannot be fully answered because some of the causes are known and some are not. The general impression that possessions occur because of an obstinate sinful life may or may not be true in a particular case. Even pious and holy persons have been known to be possessed. The following are some of the causes of possession.

**FORTUNE TELLERS AND THE LIKE.** Those who seek information from fortune tellers and ouija boards, or cures from spiritualists, often become possessed. They seek information, not from God, but from forbidden sources. Hence it is no wonder that the devils enter and give them even more information than they care to have. God complained of Ochozias, the King of Israel: “Is there not a God in Israel that ye go to consult Beelzebub, the god of Accaron?” Some spiritualists effect apparent cures by prayers, but afterward the cured persons are afflicted in other ways day and night. The devil makes them pay a heavy price for services rendered.

**MALEFICIUM.** Maleficium placed in food or drink will cause possession. The devil has his agents who prepare this diabolical substance by which he is able to enter human and

animal bodies. In this way even innocent victims may become possessed. The blessing of such food and drink will break the maleficium and render it harmless. For this reason the Church blesses all things, expelling the evil one, and dedicating them to the purpose for which they were created. The unseen benefits of every blessing will only be known in eternity.

**CURSING.** Cursing by those in authority, especially parents cursing their children, may sometimes cause diabolical possession. Some children have been found to be possessed because their parents directly offered them to the devil even before they were born. On the contrary, in the lives of the saints we find that some were offered to God before their birth. This practice is praise worthy and it should be followed by every Christian mother.

**DIRECT INVOCATION.** Should it ever happen, quod Deus Avertat, that a person would directly give himself to the evil one, possession by the devil would almost certainly follow. God is just, even in His dealings with the devils and as he would recognize the free choice of the creature who would choose Him as a Master, so also will He permit the evil spirits to take possession of those who deliver themselves to the enemy.

**PERMISSION BY GOD.** For the greater glory of God, and for His triumph over His enemies, God sometimes permits that the devil take possession of perfectly innocent people. These are His "Victim Souls," who offer themselves to God to suffer every possible torture in order that sinners may be saved. In such cases there is no question of guilt, or just retribution for faults committed; but such possession is permitted in order that the powers of Hell be weakened and glory be given to God.

### **The Blessed Sacrament in Exorcisms**

The Rituale Romanum cautions that the Blessed Sacrament should not be placed on the head of the possessed, or otherwise brought in contact with him, where there is danger of irreverence. But if this danger does not exist, for example, where the devils use no violence, this caution does not apply; and the Blessed Sacrament can be used. When the Blessed Sacrament is used, it is placed in an ordinary sick call pyx, and held on the head of the possessed by the exorcist. Its effectiveness is remarkable, and it shortens the exorcism.

### **Holy Water**

Holy water is blessed for the purpose of expelling demons. That which is blessed on Epiphany is especially efficacious because it is blessed with all the exorcisms. It should be given to the possessed at regular intervals about every half-hour, or even oftener.

### **Routine**

A good routine to follow during the exorcism is to have the possessed person kneel for fifteen minutes and then be seated for a similar period. A crucifix should be placed on the

table, and when the time comes to kneel he should adore and kiss the crucifix, and continually pray for his deliverance.

If these lines will arouse interest, and help the future exorcist to weaken the power of the devil over God's creatures, they will have served their purpose.

### **Permission to Exorcise**

Exorcism is a command to the demon, given in the name of God to depart from a person, place or thing.

The formula of exorcism as given in the Roman Ritual is not reserved. It can be used by anyone, even by a lay person. There is no prohibition forbidding its use and the Church did not reserve those beautiful prayers, exclusively to the Sacred Ministers.

Exorcism may be solemn or simple; public or private. The exorcism is solemn if it is performed to expel the demon himself; simple if it is performed to curb the influence of the demon.

The Exorcism is public if it is performed by an ordained minister who acts as an Exorcist in the name and by the authority of the Church, in virtue of the powers received in Sacred Ordination. This power over possessed persons cannot be publicly used without special and express permission of the Ordinary. This prohibition is clearly defined in Canon 1151 No. 1: "No one endowed with the power of exorcising is allowed to pronounce an exorcism over a possessed person unless he has obtained special and express permission to do so from the Ordinary." Hence, permission is required for solemn public exorcisms over possessed persons. No permission is needed for solemn public exorcisms over homes, field, animals, to places and in all private and simple exorcisms.

The Ordinary to grant this permissions is the Ordinary in whose diocese the exorcisms are performed or the Ordinary of the Priest. If the priest is an exempt religious his major superior may grant the permission.

The Exorcist having obtained the required permission exercises his power received in Sacred Ordination and he acts in the name and authority of the Church, therefore, he must use only the prescribed formula in the Roman Ritual excluding all private formulas, regardless of how pious they may be. The formula prescribed by the Church is self-sufficient, capable of expelling all spirits of darkness, hence private prayers should not be used by the exorcist during the exorcisms.

Exorcism is private, if it is performed not in the name and authority of the Church, but in the name of the expelling person. If some good holy layman would undertake to exclude the devil from a possessed person, he would be performing a solemn private exorcism for which no permission is necessary from the Ordinary. The Church restricts the public use of the power of her Ordained Exorcists, not private persons. What is permitted to a lay

person cannot be denied to a priest. When the priest acts as a private person, he should not use the exorcism stole.

Although public exorcisms performed by the authority of the Church are more effective, nevertheless the demon may also be expelled from possessed persons by private exorcisms. Christ has promised not only to His Apostles but to all who will believe in His Name, that they will cast out the devils. “These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover.” Mark XVI, 17-18.

Exorcisms should be used often, and whenever they are needed. When the permission is necessary, it should be obtained, and Ecclesiastical Superiors are not free to say yes or no. If the case is certain it must be yes, because the Sacramentals cannot be denied to a person who reasonably asks for them. It is a serious infringement of duty and inexcusable sin to leave a person in the power and tyranny of the devil, who torments his victims, day and night. In case of doubt the exorcisms can be recited conditionally, and these trial prayers should be so continued until more definite certitude is obtained. Sacraments are given conditionally, and even greater liberty is permitted with the sacramentals.

When the time does not permit the recitation of long formal prayers, as for example, during the sacramental confession, when the confessor notices the danger of a sacrilegious confession or a difficulty in confessing sins, a simple command in his own words pronounced with faith will suffice ... e.g. “I command you, evil spirit, in the name of our Lord Jesus Crucified to depart. Observe and notice the change that will follow.

### **Use of Exorcism in the Church**

Exorcisms are used very extensively in the Church. In the blessing of salt and of holy water, exorcisms are used so that these creatures of God in turn may break the power of the enemy wherever they may be sprinkled, and even put to flight the enemy himself and all his angels. The Church admits the necessity of expelling demons in the ordinary affairs of our every day life. We find water blessed for that purpose at the entrance of every church. This water is blessed the same by priests who are so reluctant to admit the necessity of expelling demons. The Church wants us to sprinkle our homes and everything we use with holy water, to break the power of the devil. Can anyone claim that this diabolical power does not exist?

In every baptism the priest uses exorcisms when he says “*exi ab eo, immunde spiritus, et da locum Spiritui Sancto Paraclito,*” and when he says, “*Exorciso te, immunde spiritus, in nomine Patris; et Filii; et Spiritus Sancti; ut exeas, et recedas ab hoc famulo Dei (N.). Ipse enim tibi imperat, maledicte dammate, recognosce sententiam tuam, et da honorem Deo vivo et vero, da honorem Jesu Christo Filio eius, et Spiritui Sancto, et recede ab hoc famula Dei (N.), qua istum sibi Deus et Dominus noster Jesus Christus ad suam sanctam tratiam, et benedictionem, fontemque Baptismatis vocare dignatus est.*” It is a direct command to the evil one to depart.

Thus in the blessing of the sick the Church says: “Effugiat ex hoc loco omnis nequitia demonum, adsint Angeli pacis, Donumque hanc deserat omnis maligna discordia.” When she blesses sick animals: “Extinguatur in eis omnis diabolica potestas et ne ulterius aegrotent.” In the blessing of linens for the sick the priest prays: “Domine Jesu Christe qui . . . spiritus nequam ab infirmis easem virtute fugasti sanitatem . . . percipere mereantur.” The official prayers of the Church admit a diabolical power to produce storms and other disturbances, for she says in the prayers for repelling tempests: “Nihil proficiat inimicus in nobis, et filius iniquitatis non apponat nocere nobis. A domo tua, quaesumus Domine, spiritalis nequitiae repellantur, et aetarum discedat malignitas tempestatum.”

In the blessing of gold, myrrh and incense: “Exorciso te creatura auri, myrrhae et thuris, per Patrem, etc. . . . ut a te discedat omnis fraus, dolus et nequitia diaboli, et sis remedium salutare humano generi contra insidias inimici.” Again, even in the blessing of the simple and pure flowers of the field on the Feast of the Assumption there is an element of exclusion of diabolical powers: “Concede ut contro diabolicas illusiones et macinationes et fraudes tutamen ferant in quocumque loco positum vel portatum aut habitum aliquid ex eis fuerit.” From these references one can read the mind of the Church in the practice of blessing. Blessings have a two-fold purpose; to bread the influence of the devil, and to consecrate the object to God.

Since the Church in her official prayers and practices admits the influence of evil spirits in the sicknesses of men and of animals, in plants and flowers, and even in inanimate objects, it would be quite presumptuous to hold a contrary opinion. To assert that the evil one has no influence over external objects is in direct opposition to the teachings and practices of the Church. Exorcisms, then, should be recited in sickness, in disaster, and war, in every disturbance, in fact, in everything which brings harm to mankind; over persons who refuse to attend divine services, and over those who are habitually in the sate of sin. In all of these cases the influence of the evil one is clearly seen, and Holy Mother Church has provided a clear and efficacious remedy in her prayers against the devil. Exorcisms may be recited at a distance from, and in the absence of, the persons molested.

It behooves every Christian, and especially the priests of Christ, to challenge the devil at every turn. The demon is the author of evil, and there is no evil which does not come from him. It is the devil who prompts all disobedience to God’s laws, it is he who instills the pride of unbelief, and it is he who sets creatures above God. He is the author of temptations, and were it not for the restraining power of God he would tempt us more than we could stand. God sets a limit that the temptation be not beyond our strength, and gives us power to fight and overcome every temptation. Temptations may arise without the tempter, but very seldom will they end without him. The cunning serpent will take every opportunity to bring about our downfall. “The devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” Peter V, 8-9.

In the prayers of exorcism in the Roman Ritual the demon is thus addressed: “Audi ergo, et time Satana, inimici fidei, hostis generis humani, mortis adductor, vitae raptor, justitiae declinator, malorum radix, fomes vitiorum, seductor hominum, proditor gentium,

incitator invidiae, orgo avaritae, cause discordiae, excitator dolorum, ... exi transgressor. Exi seductor, pleni omni dolo et fallacia, virtutis inimice, innocentium persecutor ... Deus es Filio eius Jesu Christo Domino Nostro, quem tantare ausus es et crucifigere presumpsisti. Tibi et angelis tuis inextinguibile preparatur incendium; quia tu es princeps maledicti homicidii, tu auctor incestus, tu sacrilegorum caput, to actionum pessimarum magister, us hereticorum doctor, to totius obscoenitatis inventor.”

In these prayers of exorcism the demon is called the enemy of faith, the enemy of the human race, the author of death, snatcher of life, sources of evil, fomentor of vice, origin of avarice, seducer of men, betrayer of nations, instigator of envy, cause of discord, producer of pain, persecutor of the innocent – he who has tempted, and even presumed to crucify, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called the master of evil, the doctor of heretics and the inventor of all obscenity. Since the Church admits the influence of the evil one in all vices, it follows that the tempter should be curbed and put to flight whenever vice appears. Certainly figs are not found on thorn bushes. Good comes from God – evil comes from the devil. Many sins can be prevented, and much trouble in parishes avoided, by curtailing the activities of the evil one. It is easier to curb the demon than to try to cure the disorders caused by him.

### **The Devil Should be Exposed**

The faults of a community are not secret to anyone. The bad fruit is visible to all, but many fail to see the tree on which it grows, and to recognize the demon as the originator of the evil. The blindness means success to the enemy of salvation. Many a soul would lead a much holier life if the demon were recognized as the source of sin; and sinners would not be so proud of their vices if they knew that they were following the devil, and that he was an actual reality and not a vague enigma, existing only in human fantasy.

The Church sees the devil in every evil, and provides a remedy in her numerous blessings and exorcisms; but there are clergymen who, even after many years of experience, do not recognize the instigator of all vice, and will say that they have never seen a person under the influence of the devil. They have seen sinners dying without confession, they have parishioners who have led sinful lives for years, but they will maintain that these are all free agents, that it was all their own doing, and that the sinners alone are responsible. They will absolve the tempter from all blame, and, in effect, defend the enemy. This attitude is not in accordance with the mind of the Church. Such blindness is truly regrettable. The general who would survey a battlefield and view the corpses of his slain soldiers, and still maintain that the enemy had not been there, would be removed because of stupidity. Christ has sent his priests to lead souls to heaven, and when Christ's anointed observe that many souls are slaughtered and lost for eternity, it should not be difficult to conclude that the enemy of God has done this. Show the devil to Christian souls as he really is, and his ugliness will not attract them; hide the devil, and in ignorance they will follow him. The devil has been hidden too long – not by the Church, but by some who pretend to possess greater wisdom than the Church. The power of the devil vanishes as soon as it is discovered.

## **Possession**

Besides the sporadic influence of evil beings in persons as evidenced by temptations and other evils that come to them, the devil often tries to claim for his own dominion not only men but material objects as well. When persons become possessed the condition is accompanied by various phenomena. They are forced to say and do things quite contrary to their will. They are annoyed and even tortured to an incredible degree. Food and sleep are curtailed. These manifestations differ in every case. Two elements constitute possession: presence of the devil in the body, and dominion exercised by the devil over the body. The devil does not enter the soul; he affects it indirectly through the body.

## **Signs of Possession**

The Roman Ritual mentions three principal signs of possession: speaking unknown tongues or understanding them when used by another, making known hidden and distant facts, exhibiting strength out of proportion with one's age and circumstance. These signs are not by any means exclusive, for the Ritual says: "These and other similar signs, when they occur in great number, are the surest indications of possession." It is quite possible to have a perfect case of diabolical possession without any of the above mentioned signs. The devil is not anxious to prove his presence by speaking unknown tongues or to disclose his identity by marvelous signs. Like the submarine, his power lies in his ability to remain hidden while striking from ambush. On the other hand it is impossible for the devil to possess a person without giving some sign of his presence. If the devil is there he will act. He will assert his dominion over the body by tyranny and torture. He may be able to hide some signs of the possession, but he cannot hide them all. In all cases of possession there are evidences of dual personality – the person himself and the possessing spirit. The physical person will complain of the intrusion of the other, and of the violation of his liberty. He will indicate how he is forced to act by that "something inside of him" contrary to his own conviction and violation. The possessed person will desire to eat, something will stop him; he will desire to pray and that other personality will interfere. These persons did not lose their mind, they know exactly what ails them; they are conscious of another intelligent force within them, which interferes with their freedom. They need help, and that help should be given by those who have the care of souls. It is their duty and obligation to see that these victims of diabolical possession receive the benefit of Sacramentals instituted by the Church for that purpose. It is cruel and unjust to leave them without help.

## **Procedure**

In such cases a prudent priest will ask the afflicted person to kneel and pray and say that he will recite some prayers over him – without mentioning that it is an exorcism. He will recite the Leonine Exorcism, observing well if there be any reaction. If there is, then immediately he should stop the prayer and say: "I command you in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, in the name of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of God the Holy Ghost, tell me your name." It is even better to propose the question in Latin in order that the person afflicted may not be made conscious of his condition. A useful formula is:

“Praecipio tibi in nomine Sanctissimae Trinitatis, in nomine Patris + et Filii + et Spiritus Sancti + dic mihi nomen tuum. Praecipiat tibi Deus Pater + Deus Filius + et Deus Spiritus Sanctus +. Dic mihi nomen tuum.” If no reaction be observed, recite the entire exorcism a few times at least, and then propose the questions. If the evil spirit answers, then ask: “How many are with you? How long have you been in this person, and why?” If the priest receives answers to these questions, then there is no longer doubt about the possession. Once the fact of possession has been established, permission of the Ordinary should not be difficult to obtain but gladly given. “Sacramenta et sacramentalia sunt propter homines, et legitime potenti denegari nequent.”

Bishops are successors of the apostles, sent to spread the Gospel and establish the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in the souls of men. But to do so the dominion of the devil must be broken, and souls freed from his oppression. Ecclesiastical superiors should beg good priests to undertake this strenuous and hard work of exorcisms – not that the priests should beg them. Frequently it is very difficult to convince the authorities of a possession case and obtain the necessary permission. All priests are exorcists. This was one of the first powers given by the Master to His apostles, and it is one of the first priestly powers given in Holy Orders. If ecclesiastical superiors would tell their priests that they would be called on to undertake cases of possession, and to prepare themselves for it, we would have less skeptics and more piety. This alone would be a very efficient urge to every exorcist to a holy life. The nightly vigil advocated by Father Matteo, and an hour a day before the Blessed Sacrament, would become a universal custom.

If, after few recitals of exorcism, no answer is received, it does not mean that there is no possession. In some cases the demon gave answer to the above questions only after ten days of exorcisms. In milder cases the answers are given almost at the very beginning.

### **Possession Not Rare**

Let no one think that possession cases are so rare that it is necessary to go back to the time of Christ to find one. There is no city, not even a single parish, free from cases of possession. This is not a wild assertion made without thought or consideration, but is based on personal experience. I have discovered so many cases of possession that I could not handle them all, even if I worked at them 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The possession of animals is even more frequent. Inanimate objects and articles used for sinful purposes may be possessed. The possessed ouija board will give answers, but if such a board be blessed it will not give any answers. Satan establishes his claim on places and articles of sin, because by sin they have been dedicated to him; just as by blessings of the Church, objects and places are consecrated to God. Hence, it is useful to bless places often. The Church advises that the homes of the faithful be blessed every year. As the state of grace is lost by sin, articles lose their blessing when they are used for sinful purposes, and places become defiled when sins are committed in them. For this reason the Church reconciles Churches and cemeteries when crimes were committed in them.

It is a known fact that there were many cases of possession in the time of Our Saviour. Christ is mentioned about thirty times in the Gospels expelling the demon. The Apostles



frequently used their powers, and their successors throughout the ages have done the same. Of this we have many examples in the lives of the Saints.

### **Criticisms**

Constructive criticism which throws more light on the subject is welcomed and appreciated, but criticisms based on ignorance and inexperience only multiply the hardships of the exorcist. He should be helped by sacrifice and prayers in a work which so few are willing to undertake, rather than be laughed to scorn by those who do not know. To all skeptics and critics who have no experience in such matters, and only criticise “a priori,” there is only one answer: “Your criticism is a contra factum.”