
SAINTS
WHO BATTLED
SATAN

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Seventeen Holy Warriors
Who Can Teach You How to Fight the Good Fight
and Vanquish Your Ancient Enemy

Paul Thigpen

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*For my daughter, Lydia; her husband,
Michael; and my son, Elijah*

“Fight the good fight of the faith!”
1 Timothy 6:12

St. Michael the archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God thrust into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. AMEN.

—POPE LEO XIII

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- INTRODUCTION -

OUR COMRADES, THE SAINTS

The Church Triumphant and the Church Militant

The life of man upon the earth is a warfare.

Job 7:1 (Douay-Rheims)

A century and a half before the coming of Christ, the Jewish homeland was invaded, occupied, and desecrated by troops of the Seleucid Empire. Judas Maccabeus was the Jewish general who led his followers in armed resistance to the foreigners and their attempts to force the Jews to abandon their faith.

Before one of their battles, Judas exhorted the soldiers to fight valiantly. “He armed each of them,” the Scripture tells us, “not so much with confidence in shields and spears as with the inspiration of brave words, and he cheered them all by relating a dream, a sort of vision, which was worthy of belief” (2 Mc 15:11).

In this vision, the general saw Onias, a former high priest, “praying with outstretched arms for the whole body of the Jews” (v. 12). Then he saw the prophet Jeremiah, “who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city.” The prophet was a man of “marvelous majesty and authority” (v. 14).

Both of these men had died some time before Judas received the vision. But by their prayers, they were helping their brothers still on earth who needed comrades in the struggle—not just for their homeland, but for their souls. The vision concluded with a scene guaranteed to fortify the faith of the soldiers: “Jeremiah stretched out his right hand and gave to Judah a golden sword, and as he gave it, he addressed him thus: ‘Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries’” (vv. 15–16).

The battle soon began, and the Jewish resistance fighters were victorious.

The Devil Prowls

This vision of Judas should serve us even today as a consolation and an inspiration. We too are engaged in a critical battle for our souls—and ours is fought against the ancient and powerful Enemy of all the human race. “Be sober, be watchful,” St. Peter warns. “Your adversary the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8).

Thanks be to God that we have as our comrades in this conflict a host of saints in heaven. Now that they have won their own battle and their victor’s crown, they stand before God, sharing in the triumph of Jesus Christ their Commander, who vanquished Satan on the Cross. But they are by no means simply resting on their laurels in God’s presence. As members of the Church Triumphant (those who can now exult in victory), they are eager to assist the members of the Church Militant (those who must still soldier on in this world).

Their courageous conduct when they too were soldiers on earth can provide us with a marvelous example to follow. Because they knew how to fight and defeat the Devil, their wisdom can advise us. Best of all, they now have a share in

God's own nature (see 2 Pt 1:4), which includes His power and authority: "If we persevere, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tm 2:12). So they are able not just to intercede for us but to engage the Enemy directly and effectively on our behalf through the divine power that they share.

Together, under the leadership of Christ, our Commander, the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant make up a mighty army (with the angels, of course, as its third division). The twelfth-century mystical writer Hugh of St. Victor describes this reality vividly:

For the Incarnate Word is our King, who came into this world to war with the Devil. . . . The king himself is in the midst of His army and proceeds protected and surrounded on all sides by His columns. . . . All are serving the one King and following the one banner. All are pursuing the one enemy and are being crowned by the one victory.¹

Why Were These Particular Saints Chosen?

The purpose of this book is to present the stories and insights of a number of saints who battled Satan so that we can become more familiar with our heavenly comrades and more eager to seek their help. From among the many saints I could have included, I have chosen a few, presented in chronological order, whose experience offers a wide variety of compelling lessons in combat. I have not attempted to provide a biography of each saint but only enough information to identify them and to tell about their struggles.

In each chapter, I have also tried to present a bit of historical context that notes the features of the broader spiritual battlefield of the Church of that time. My hope is that such context serves as a reminder that our warfare is not just a matter of personal interior struggle, and that the conduct

¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, II.

of each spiritual soldier makes a critical difference in the outcome of the wider battle.

In many ways, the accounts in this book can be seen as historical illustrations of the spiritual realities and principles laid out in my *Manual for Spiritual Warfare* (TAN Books, 2014). There, I offer a brief summary of Satan's strategies, as well as the weapons and armor we have been given by God to defeat him.

In the present work, we can see concrete examples of how the Devil assaults his foes, not just through extraordinary preternatural attacks but through common temptations, both powerful and subtle. We can observe how the saints have used prayer and fasting, the sacraments, sacramentals, the Scripture, and other spiritual weapons to resist him. And we can discover how the virtues they cultivated protected their souls as a sturdy armor against diabolical temptation and attack.

“Worthy of Belief”

Skeptics may read these accounts and scoff in disbelief. Perhaps they deny the existence of demons or presume that preternatural phenomena simply do not occur. Even so, my personal experiences and those of countless others—not to mention the testimony of Our Lord Himself, Scripture, and two millennia of Christian tradition—have all convinced me otherwise.

I present these stories, then, for the same reason that Judas told his soldiers about his vision: They are powerful and heartening, and I consider them “worthy of belief” (2 Mc 15:11). My prayer, then, is that in reading such remarkable accounts of saints who battled Satan, “inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience” (1 Tm 1:18-19).

Paul Thigpen
August 4, 2015
Feast of St. John Vianney

- CHAPTER 1 -

EVE AND THE SERPENT

The War Begins

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Revelation 12:9

She was utterly innocent, untainted by sin, unacquainted with misery. But she was also untested, so her innocence left her gullible, vulnerable to the wiles of a deadly Enemy masquerading as her friend.

Her name was Eve. And her Enemy's name was Satan.

Eve and her husband, Adam, were of course the first parents of the human race. They were created by God in His own image, with an intellect and a free will, as a beloved son and daughter who could love Him in return. They walked with God in righteousness—that is, in right relationship with Him, with each other, with themselves, and with the world that God had given them to be their home.

They lived in Eden, a paradise, free from disordered desires, suffering, sorrow, and death. They had received divine grace as a supernatural gift to unite them to God. And they possessed the knowledge and wisdom necessary to achieve the destiny that God had appointed for them: to love, serve, enjoy, and glorify Him forever.

Angelic Rebellion

Satan, on the other hand, was an angel. He had been created a pure spirit by God, good and splendid with the gifts that God had given him and his fellow angels so that they, too, might achieve their appointed destiny. His name was originally Lucifer, the “light bearer.” He was mighty and brilliant and beautiful.

But Satan had rejected that destiny. He had chosen instead his own defiant path in an attempt to overthrow his Creator and take His place. Many of his angelic comrades had followed his lead.

How, we might ask, could a few grains of sand on the seashore ever hope to subdue the ocean? How could a swarm of gnats think to rule the sky? Their pride had darkened their minds, and they had deceived themselves.

Their judgment was swift and sure. The angels still loyal to God cast them out of heaven, with the Archangel Michael leading the battle against the fallen ones.

These unclean spirits, now the Devil and his demons, had no possibility of repentance and reform. The free and full choice they had made with all their being was definitive, irrevocable. They could never return home.

Their hatred toward God knew no bounds. Since they could not conquer Him, they would vent their rage by assaulting His children, defiling His image. And whenever possible, they would draw His sons and daughters down with them into the hellfire of absolute, eternal separation from their Father in heaven.

When the time was right, then, the Devil slithered as a serpent into the garden of paradise. The war in heaven had become a war on earth.

Seductions, Lies, and Doubts

What would be the Adversary’s strategy? First, divide and conquer. When the woman was alone, he would come to

her. And once he had overcome her, he would go for her husband, through her. He would not approach them together; together, they would have more strength to resist.

When Satan found Eve, he spoke smoothly, gently, not with a threat or even a challenge, but with a probe posing as a reasonable question. “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Gn 3:1).

She replied that God had said they could eat the fruit of all the trees except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate from that tree, or even touched it, God had warned they would die (see Gn 3:2–3).

Clearly, she knew the divine commandment. So the Devil’s task would be to entice her to disobey it knowingly. If she did, she would be joining him in his rebellion.

He knew just the trick.

First, Satan planted doubts in her mind about God’s character and intentions. “You will not die,” he insisted (Gn 3:4). *God is a liar*. “For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5). *God sees you as a rival. He wants to keep you from becoming a threat to His power*.

The oily thoughts greased her mind, so that her faith in God began to slip away.

“You will be like God.” The words resonated within her powerfully, for they echoed her deepest longing. After all, God had made her in His own image; He had *created* her to be like Him. No wonder she felt drawn to that tree.

“The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gn 3:6). The Enemy was crafty. He pointed out to her the attractive things that she naturally desired, because they were good in themselves: likeness to God, nourishing food, beauty, wisdom. Then he suggested a shortcut to obtain those goods: disobedience to God.

Eve surrendered, it seems, without a fight. She ate the fruit and gave it to Adam. He surrendered as well. They lost the battle almost as soon as it had begun.

A World of Woe

The new prisoners were dragged into the Enemy's camp, naked and trembling, full of fear and shame. God's judgment followed swiftly, as each one tried to escape the sentence by passing the blame: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gn 3:12). "The Serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (v. 13).

A divine curse sealed their fate: Pain and sorrow, toil and trouble would be their miserable lot. Just as they had rebelled against God, their bodies would rebel against their souls, and the earth would rebel against their stewardship, until death came at last—relief, yes, but a terrifying relief.

Even so, in the gathering darkness, a single spark of hope appeared. God prophesied that the day would come when the Seed of the woman—her descendant—would crush the head of the Serpent (see Gn 3:15). For thousands of years, the recollection of those puzzling words would provoke countless debates about their meaning.

Yet one thing was certain. Though the first battle had been lost, the war on earth had only just begun.