

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

For, although we are in the flesh, we do not battle according to the flesh, for the weapons of our battle are not of flesh but are enormously powerful, capable of destroying fortresses. We destroy arguments and every pretension raising itself against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive in obedience to Christ. The Word of the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

Reflection – Abolishing the spiritual strongholds in our minds

Spiritual strongholds keep the unbeliever unbelieving and the believer weak in faith. What are spiritual strongholds? They are referred to as “fortresses” in 2 Corinthians 10:4. St Paul also calls them “arguments and every pretension raising itself against the knowledge of God”. Based on error and deception and strongly entrenched in human minds, a spiritual stronghold is any thinking, idea, ideology, philosophy or mindset that elevates itself against God’s truths. They have a strong influence on human feelings, attitudes and behaviour. They are the powerful weapons of the Evil One and their presence in human minds result in temptation and sin. All have fallen from grace and none except our Immaculate Mother is free from varying degrees of wrong thinking of the human mind.

How does Satan establish strongholds in our minds? Satan knows the weakness of every soul. Souls that are weak in the virtues will be more susceptible to the attacks by Satan. A soul that is weak in humility and faith will be more open to Satan’s temptation to shift focus from God to self. It can lead to a self-seeking mindset that unconsciously elevates itself against love of and loyalty to God impeding any progress in holiness. When the soul takes the faith for granted and makes no concrete attempt to advance in holiness, Satan can make successful attempts for strongholds to be established in such minds that are not securely rooted in the truths of and loyalty Christ. Satan can use any falsehood to tempt a human mind and to present it as a truth. For instance, Satan can tempt with the attraction of logical thinking and takes it to such heights in which it cannot operate such as in spiritual matters. Thus, such soul will not understand the ways of God and will always try to explain away God’s miracles in order to satisfy his mindset of logical thinking. Another common scourge in human mind is moral relativism. Such a mind taken captive by moral relativism will find it impossible to accept the truths of God as taught to us by Christ.

Strongholds keep us bounded to the earth. Unless we subject our minds to God’s truths and holy discipline, most of the time we will find it hard to free and elevate our minds from inordinate focus on earthly things/matters. Strongholds of worldly attitude, materialism, love of money and pursuits of earthly concerns keep our focus and energies on achieving our earthly goals. Such relentless pursuits of worldly attractions or earthly concerns leave us distracted from our true mission and no energies to pursue the treasures that last. Thus, we dissipate our time and live a mediocre Christian life that is hardly any different from that of a non-believer. We apply two standards: one high rigorous standard for achieving earthly goals and a vastly lowered one for our interior Christian life. In this rut we trust self-reliance and self-sufficiency, display a worldly attitude and unconsciously a lack of real faith.

In Christ we are more than conquerors (cf. Romans 8:37). Through His life, death and resurrection, Christ has gained for us every grace we need in order to rise up to the call to holiness. When He was fasting in the desert, Jesus was tempted three times for our sakes. He was tempted to place above God His need for food (representing legitimate human needs), the attraction of earthly treasures and glory (representing the lure of the false lights of the world), and to display His pride of being Son of God. While hanging on the Cross in agony, Jesus was taunted to come down from the Cross. Jesus overcame triumphantly all these temptations through His overwhelming love of God and His holy will. Through Christ, God has made available to us any grace we need in order to overcome any temptation or stronghold in our minds. Thus, St Paul tells us that nothing should break our love or allegiance to God: not trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or danger or sword (cf. Romans 8:35-37). In short, not even our very life which is a gift from God to us.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, I come before You as Your little child with the sincere desire of a deep understanding of my faults. With Your help of Your grace, I will not defend myself but work to overcome every obstacle and weakness that leave me with no desire to respond to Your call to holiness. Teach me to understand and to have a great love of the virtues especially holy love and holy humility so that every virtue can take stronger root in me. Help me work on overcoming my faults and weakness through an interior life of prayer, sacrifices, the Sacraments and keeping and living Your Word. Give me a great love for God’s truths and God’s Word, and be my holy stronghold against the devil’s deception and lies. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus. www.twohearts.hk