

The Attack on Religious Liberty and the Catholic Church: The Spiritual Dynamics and Our Role"

Ralph Martin, February 26th, 2012

I must say that this was a particular joy and comfort that I am here today amongst so many friends and people I've known for so many years, but it is also with a certain trepidation and discomfort that I'm here, because golly, I'm talking to people who see me take out the garbage every Thursday night! That's kind of a funny experience

Father Michael Keating spoke last session about healing the intellectual wounds of our culture, and I'm going to pick up where Father Mike left off. One of the things that Father Mike was emphasizing was the harmony in the Catholic World View between faith and reason. That's really a very precious, and very valuable and very important thing because of the irrationality that's happening in the world today and the denial of the intelligibility of creation or human nature.

Human reason, the Church teaches us, can only take us so far and can only take us so far in healing the wounds of the mind. In the first Vatican council in one of its constitutions it says some things about the role of reason: "The same Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things by the natural power of human reason." And then it quotes Romans 1. It says, "It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself in the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that is supernatural, way. This is how the apostle puts it "In many and various ways, God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son." It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves beyond the scope of human reason (so what's not beyond the scope of human reason would be the natural law, difference between right and wrong, existence of God but there are some things that are beyond human reason such as the Trinity the incarnation, who Jesus is, the plan of salvation. Even the things that human reason can reach, sometimes it doesn't in fact reach because of the Fall.), can even in the present state of the human race be known by everyone without difficulty, with firm certitude and no admitting of error." Even though it is theoretically possible for basic things to be known by human reason, because of the Fall, sometimes it is intermingled with errors, sometimes it is confused.

In 1950 Pope Pius XII published an Encyclical called *Humani Generis* where he elaborated on this. He said: "Disagreement and error among men on moral and religious matters have always been a cause of profound sorrow to all good men but above all to the true and loyal sons of the church. Especially today when we see the principles of Christian culture being attacked on all sides." So this was 72 years ago.

The battle we are currently experiencing isn't a new battle. It actually started way back in the garden when the Father said "I will put enmity between the seed of the woman and the serpent" and that's the battle that was going on 70 years ago, that's the battle that has been going on through all human history and that's the battle we're experiencing right now today with the religious liberty questions that we're facing. Anyway, Pope Pius XII goes on: "It is not surprising that such discord and error should always

have existed outside the fold of Christ. For though, absolutely speaking, human reason by its own natural force and light can arrive at a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who by his providence watches over and governs the world and also of the natural law which the creator has written in our hearts. Still, there are not a few obstacles to prevent reason from making efficient and fruitful use of its natural ability. The truths that have to do with God, and the relations between God and men, completely surpass the sensible order and demand self-surrender and self-abdication in order to be put into practice and to influence practical life. Now the human intellect (It's going to get a little less abstract in a few minutes, but this is like preparation) in gaining the knowledge of such truths is hampered both the activity of the senses and the imagination and by evil passions arising from original sin. Hence, men easily persuade themselves in such matters that what they do not wish to believe is false, or at least doubtful."

What it's saying is that there is something in our heart that doesn't want to know the truth. There is something in our heart that is looking for ways to deny the truth about God, to deny the truth about morality. There is a big problem even with human reaching what is theoretically within the grasp of human reason. The pope goes on to say: "It is for this reason that divine revelation must be considered morally necessary so that those religious and moral truths which are not of their nature beyond the reach of reason, in the present condition of the human race, may be known by all men readily with a firm certainty and with freedom from all error." So even those things which theoretically we can reach by reason, the pope here is saying, actually, revelation is morally necessary. For all practical purposes we need God to reveal to us, God to speak to us, because our use of reason is impeded.

That leads us to Sacred Scripture. Now, there's been so much confusion about what the Catholic Church believes about Sacred Scripture that I want to share with you what Vatican II taught about what we should believe on Sacred Scripture. Section 11 of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation says: "Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the HS, we must acknowledge that the books of scripture firmly, faithfully and without error teach that truth which God for the sake of our salvation wished to see confided to the sacred scriptures" So it's a very high view of the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. This really is the inspired word of God. What it says, it says it teaches "firmly, faithfully and without error that truth which God for the sake of our salvation wished to see confided to the sacred scriptures." So this is a very, very precious gift to the Church: Sacred Scripture.

In section 21 of the same Constitution of Vatican II it says "The Church has always venerated the divine scriptures just as she venerates the body of the lord. Since especially in the sacred liturgy she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body." The rest of that section is very useful, but we have limited time and have done enough constitutions.

Now, back in November I had a deadline for our January newsletter, our renewal ministries newsletter (See the whole newsletter article at <http://renewalministries.net/files/newsletters/jan12.pdf>). I had to write this on November 15th. It says: "Dear partners in the mission: The persecution has begun. After

years of secularizing influences, some of those now in positions of political, intellectual and legal authority feel strong enough to openly enact punitive measures against the Catholic Church, and sometimes, Christians in general. In just the last few years, governmental regulations have been interpreted to mean that unless Catholic institutions agree to arrange the adoption of children by “same sex” couples they will not be able to continue their adoption services. Catholic adoption agencies in California and Massachusetts have had to discontinue all their adoption services as a result of not being able to in conscience comply.

On the national level, Catholic aid agencies who don’t agree to provide abortion services have had their grants discontinued.” And of course this all happened before the most recent mandate that initially required Catholic institutions to provide healthcare services that included abortifacient drugs and sterilizations as well as contraceptives. Both in the US and Canada there is an aggressive hostile effort that isn’t accidental. The latest mandate wasn’t a blunder. There is a sense that the Church is weak, that the people aren’t following the Bishops anymore and now is the chance to really impose our secular agenda and drive the church back into the ghetto. That’s what this is all about. In communist times they allowed some churches to remain open as long as they stayed in the Church and didn’t proclaim the name of Christ in the public square. They’re trying to drive us from the public square back into the ghetto and not be able to speak certain things.

In Canada for example, they have erected human rights tribunals and the way they work is that anybody can make an accusation against anybody else for so called “hate speech” and all their expenses are paid to prosecute that case. All the expenses of the people accused of hate speech have to be borne by themselves. I was just in Calgary, Canada a few months ago and the Bishop there has twice been accused to these human rights tribunals for hate speech for simply teaching Catholic teaching on marriage and sexuality. And twice he’s been vindicated but they’re draining the diocese financially. So we really are facing hostile forces.

Now one of the encouraging things is that I’ve never seen the Catholic bishops in the US get so excited and so strong and so clear and so unified in my whole life. And so, praise the lord! And that’s really encouraging and we know that for those who love God and work for the good, that the Lord is permitting this persecution. And we don’t like to really admit this, but honestly the Church is a lot better when it’s being persecuted. I mean, I can’t bring myself to pray for persecution but the Lord sends it when it’s helpful. I’ve seen more good done just in the last few months in terms of the Bishops waking up to what’s going on and maybe even noticing parts of the scripture that haven’t been noticed for a good while. Like, “He who is a friend to the world, is an enemy of God.” We haven’t heard that very much. We haven’t heard a lot of things very much but it’s becoming more relevant. As the Christian culture collapses, things that have been in scripture all along but we’ve been blind to are going to come alive in a new way. In some ways, the only way to understand what’s really going on is to take a look at what Scripture tells us is going on. Which we will now do.

Incidentally, my wife Anne, who is here today, heard me give a talk related to this and she said, “You sound like Rick Santorum!” Now, this is not a political endorsement, but listen to what he said in a speech to Ave Maria University. Santorum speaking at the conservative Catholic Ave Maria University in Florida praised the Catholic Bishop Samuel Aquila for pledging to deny communion to politicians who support abortion rights and said “the matter went beyond politics and was a symptom of Satan’s reach in US society.” One of my sons-in-law texted me and said “Santorum has breached the spiritual barrier.” And he says, “While we all see this as a great political conflict (and he talks about the culture wars),

what Bishop Aquila put his finger on and what I think I suspect those of you who are here understand, this is not a political war, this is not a cultural war, this is a spiritual war and the father of lies has his sights set on what you would think the father of lies would have his sights set on.” That’s true. And this is what Scripture tells us about what is really going on.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul describes what Jesus told them to do in different ways. In Acts chapter 26, he’s in the custody of the Roman Procurator Festus and Festus has called King Agrippa and his sexual partner, who is also his sister Bernice, to hear Paul. So Paul is giving his testimony again and this is what he says: “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language ‘Saul, Saul why do you persecute me! It hurts you to kick against the goads!’ and I said ‘Who are you, Lord?’ and the Lord said ‘I am Jesus whom you were persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared to you for this purpose to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles to whom I send you.” Then he says what’s Paul supposed to do when he’s sent to the Gentiles: “to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” This is Jesus describing what the mission of the Church is all about, what Paul’s mission is all about: “...helping people to turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” The Church.

This basic vision of reality, this basic vision of the mission of the Church, this basic vision of what evangelization is all about, is told time and time again throughout the scripture. Colossians Chapter 1: “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins.” So evangelization is being transferred from the dominion of Satan to the lordship of Christ and the fellowship of the Church. That’s what evangelization is all about. It is changing loyalties, it’s changing the influence we’re under, it is changing how we think about things, its changing whose dominion we’re under.

1 John Chapter 5:8-12. I’m not going to read it all, but: “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God: that he has given testimony to his son. He who believes in the son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony that God has born to his son. And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his son. He who has the son has life. He who has not the son of God, has not life.” Now remember what the Church tells us about how to regard these words. These words are teaching us the truth without error firmly and in-errantly. These are the words of God himself in the words of man. “He who has the son, has life, he who has not the son of God, has not life.” When we think of sin, we don’t oftentimes think of the sin of unbelief. Not to believe God is a very grave sin. Not to believe the testimony that God the father gives to his son in so many different ways is a very grave sin, the sin of unbelief.

Father Francis Martin says “The root sin of the world is the refusal to believe in Jesus and the place he holds next to the Father as the revelation of the Father. The root sin is to reject the truth.” And then he quotes John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the son will not see

life but must endure God's wrath." Father Francis goes on to describe that the wrath of God is not God getting angry at people, but is our experience of God's holiness when we're rejecting it. It's the anguish of soul and the darkness of mind that comes when we say no to the testimony that God is giving to his Son.

A few more texts, 1 John 5:19-21: "We know that we are of God and the whole world is in the power of the evil one." This is the truth! We're not used to thinking about this as the truth, but those who aren't under the rule of Christ are subject to the powers of the principalities, are subject to the darkness of mind, are subject to the perversion of will, are subject to every wined doctrine, are subject to a culture that's trying to cut people off from the truth of God, subject to all the wounds of the mind that Father Mike talked about last session.

There needs to be a deliverance of the mind from deception before there can be a healing of the mind. We have experienced the deliverance of healing, sometimes what blocks healing, is the lack of deliverance. We need to help people get free from the lies and deceptions that are wounding their souls and minds and hearts. And only after that can the healing of God come to the mind in the word of God and in the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Again, in 1 John Chapter 2: "Do not love the world or the things in the world." One of the things that we are going to be waking up to in the next couple years is that there is a difference between the world and the church. A difference that has gotten very blurred. For many, many years us American Catholics have tried to be friends of the world and we've succeeded to a large extent. But now we're going to have to wake up to the fact that the power that's at work in the world is different than the power that's at work in the church and we're going to have to discern that and make choices in light of it.

Cardinal Dolan invited me to be a guest on his weekly radio program the week before he left for Rome and we were talking about the legislative actions that can be taken and the legal and electoral, but when that's all said and done, this is a spiritual war and I pointed out to him that 58% of American Catholics agree with forcing us to do things that violate our conscience. After we resist this evil as much as best we can through worldly means, we're going to have to really devote ourselves to the spiritual weapons of the warfare: intercessory prayer and preaching and teaching the word of God. We're going to have to rebuild the foundations of the Catholic people. The foundations have eroded. 30-40 years of poor catechesis, of wishy-washy leadership, of letting a thousand blossoms bloom most of which were poison is going have to end. We're going to have to re-evangelize and re-catechize the Catholic people. That's why the New evangelization is so important. What's new about the New Evangelization is whom it's directed to. It's not directed to undiscovered tribes out in Papua New Guinea, it's directed to friends and neighbors who have been baptized but are not living as Disciples of Christ. That's what the New Evangelization is about, it's a new effort of proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the Faith and awakening people to who they are as Catholics, who have the name of Catholic but are not living as Disciples of Christ.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the father is not in him. For all that is in the world..." Now, you've all heard the distinction between the world that God

loves so much and is good and beautiful and wonderful and the world that has gotten wounded by sin and has come under the control of Satan as working to oppose the salvation of Christ and blind the human race to the hope of salvation. That's this world misshapen by sin and under the dominion of the Devil that the Lord wants to liberate and rescue and restore to its original goodness. The whole creation is groaning and travailing because the whole creation has been marked by sin and marked by the fall and waiting for the redemption and liberation of the sons and daughters of God and the healing of creation. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away in the lust of it. But he who does the will of God abides forever." We're talking about the precious gift of eternal life. We're talking about salvation. Evangelization is not just like an optional enrichment exercise for those who like spiritual things. Evangelization is for people who think they're so worldly, and so unspiritual and so fleshly and so uninterested in spiritual things and who don't know that the deepest truth about every single human being, the only reason why every single person alive on the face of the earth today is alive, is that they have been created for union with God. And it's the sacred mission of the Church, the sacred privilege of the Church, to participate with Christ in continuing to seek and to save those who were lost. It's about salvation. It's about transferring from one kingdom to the Kingdom of Christ which is embodied now in the Church.

Ephesians Chapter 6: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For 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 host of wickedness in the heavenly places." You know, Satan made a tremendous effort to destroy the Church through Communism, in one way, but he is making a tremendous effort to destroy the Church through western materialism. It's the same practical atheism, it's the same rejection of God, and it's the same rebellion of man. It's the same thing. It's a new kind of persecution and totalitarianism that's now beginning to show its teeth. "Therefore take the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day." This is the practical instructions for how to live in the time of combat. And if people don't know they are living in a time of combat, it's probably because they've already been captured by the enemy and are now in a nice POW camp, something like a federal prison – you hardly know it's a prison! They've been captured, they're not in the battle, they've been lulled to sleep, they're not dangerous to the kingdom of Satan anymore, and they're not helping the human race reach salvation anymore.

"Therefore take the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to keep on standing. Stand therefore!" It's kind of like, be steady, be firm, have fortitude, have courage. "Having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (holiness) and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace." Truth, holiness, evangelization. "Besides this taking the shield of faith with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one." And there's tremendous wisdom in our tradition about how to quench the darts of the evil one, how to deal with temptation, how to deal with sin. The book "Fulfillment of all Desire" is filled

with wisdom like that. If you don't have Lenten reading yet, do that, it's a good book! "And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God." We're protected from the evil one by the truth and we set people free from the deception of the evil one by the truth, by the word of God, which is the sword of the spirit. There's defensive armor, you've heard this all before, and there is the offensive weapon of the word of God - pray at all times in the Spirit and so on and so forth.

Ok, one more text for this section (you notice the qualification, it's just for this section, there's more coming), from 2 Corinthians Chapter 10: "For though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war." We have to exercise our best duties as citizens and avail ourselves of our legal rights and our voting rights and our legislative rights and we have to resist evil and the diminishment of religious freedom in any way we can. But at root, it's going to go on no matter what happens. If we turn this back, the Lord in his mercy is giving us a space for continued freedom, but there will be other attacks, because the attack isn't rooted in the present characters. The attack has been going on since the beginning and will continue to go on. So the spiritual warfare, this vision of reality that the Lord gives us in scripture, is relevant at all times. It's even more relevant when Christendom has collapsed and the protection of society that used to be there, that used to be supportive of faith, isn't there anymore. "For though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war. For the weapons of our warfare are not worldly." But it isn't like they're less powerful; they have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Satan erects strongholds in peoples' minds and the way these strongholds get demolished is by the word of truth coming to reveal what is deception and to announce the truth with divine power. The words of scripture and the truth of Christ. As we speak it in personal conversations, as we speak it to ourselves, as we have the opportunities to teach CCD or Religious Ed, as we have a chance to speak the word to each other as husbands and wives and as parents and children, that word has divine power to keep people free and to set people free from the deception of the evil one. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to the mind of Christ.

The process of growth in the Catholic life is growing to more and more union with the mind and heart and will of Christ. Theresa of Avila described holiness as bringing our will into unity with God's will bringing our mind into harmony with the mind of God. How do we do that? By the word and the Spirit, as it works in all the different ways through the life of the Church.

Ok, John Chapter 8. We're in a new section, so we can do a new scripture passage. "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.'" Jesus is talking to people who already believed in him and he says if you continue believing, if you continue in my word, you are really my disciples and you will continue to know the truth and the truth will make you free.

So there is a progressive deliverance from deception that happens as a part of growth in the Catholic life. We have faith, but there's more for us to know, more for us to be set free, there's more wounds of the mind to be healed, there's more deception to be freed from, there's more love to experience,

there's more joy and freedom that the Lord wants to give us, there's more wisdom and insight into what's going on in the world and what's going on in relationships that the Lord wants us to have.

The Catholic life isn't supposed to be static. It's not supposed to be hatched, matched and dispatched, you know. It's supposed to be an ever growing appropriation of him, drawn into the life of Christ himself and the mind and heart of Christ and more and more participating in the mission of Christ, more and more participating in Christ living in us, our hope of glory. What is Christ doing in us? He is fiercely loving God his father. Zeal for his father's house consumes him. He only does what the Father shows him, he only teaches what the Father gives him and Jesus wants to bring us into that fierce love for his father. But he also wants to have us experience the Father's love for him.

Jesus wants to bring us in to the love which he receives from the Father. Jesus also wants to bring us into his fierce love for human beings. This all comes from baptism! I mean, hello! This all is there in baptism and this is why the New Evangelization is awakening people to the Sacrament of Baptism which then leads us to understand the Eucharist, which then leads us to understand life in the Church, which then leads us to experience the communion of saints, which then leads us to participate in the mission of the church.

Evangelization isn't complete until it leads people to baptism if they haven't been baptized, to confirmation if they haven't been confirmed, and to life in the Catholic Church partaking in the Eucharist if they haven't experienced that. And yes, we have a ragged situation today, and yes, God is merciful to so many people outside the Catholic Church. But what he desires is like a mother hen to gather everybody together in the deepest possible union and communion of love. And quite frankly, the protection against deception that Jesus intends for his Church is only there in full measure in the Catholic Church. And historically, groups of Christians who separate themselves from the communion of the Church and the tradition of the Church become subject to the culture and begin changing their teaching because of pressure from the culture. And so the place of safety and protection and freedom from error is really in the Catholic Church. And yes, we sure have our problems, and yes, people are sure unfaithful, and yes, we have nothing to boast about in the wrong kind of boasting, but we can boast about the treasure even though it's in an earthen vessel. We can thank God that despite the earthen vessel, the treasure is no less precious. The treasure God has placed in the Church. The treasure he's given us in being Catholics.

Anyway, there are some bystanders to hear what Jesus is saying to his disciples and they say "We don't need to be set free, we're descendants of Abraham." Well, to make a long, fascinating story shorter, they say, "How can you say this? How can you speak like you're speaking? You're hardly 50 years old!" And then of course Jesus says, "The fact is, before Abraham came to be, I am." You know, if we're doing a movie on this, we'd all hit the deck. I'm almost hitting the deck right now just experiencing "I am Who Am." That's of course what Yahweh said to his people, "I am the one who is." Now, when the testimony to the truth is given, when the word is spoken, when Jesus is revealed, it really causes a crisis to the human heart and we have a terrible decision to make, are we going to believe and repent or are we

going to pick up stones to stone him? Are we going to suffocate the witness to the truth and actually fall into idolatry?

This is important because the salvation of billions of souls is at stake. Second Thessalonians Chapter 2, Paul says, "Let no one seduce you no matter how. Since the mass apostasy has not yet occurred, nor the man of lawlessness been revealed." And then there's a description of the man of lawlessness, the antichrist. "You know what restrains him until he shall be revealed in his own time. The secret force of lawlessness is already at work, mind you, but there is one who holds him back until that restrainer shall be taken from the scene." So, there is something that's restraining the work of lawlessness, the work of Satan. At a certain point, just before the Lord returns, that restrainer will be removed and there will be unrestrained lawlessness.

Now, I don't know if what we're seeing now is this or not. Certainly, there was a restraint on the working of evil for 1700 years of Christian culture. That restraint is being systematically being stripped away and what is being revealed is a great hostility towards Christ and the Church that has been there under the surface, but has been restrained, it is now unrestrained. There's unrestrained mockery of God, there's unrestrained shame, there's unrestrained bizarre kind of parading as a virtue what is a perverse vice, there's wickedness parading itself and trumpeting itself in a way that we never could have imagined 30 or 40 years ago. And it's getting worse. Maybe the restrainer has been removed or maybe this is just a good dress rehearsal for something even worse in the future, but this could be it.

Anyway, "At that point the lawless one will appear as part of the working of Satan accompanied by all the power and signs and wonders at the disposal of falsehood." In that text of John 8 that I just skipped over so quickly, Jesus says to the Pharisees, you know you're not really children of Abraham; Abraham is not your father. Your father is the devil. And there's no truth in the devil and there's no truth in you. Now, Jesus didn't back off from the confrontation. He wasn't trying to win friends and influence people like we normally think about it, he was actually trying to win friends by confronting falsehood and hoping to set people free by speaking the truth directly and boldly. Your father is the devil, he's a murderer and he's a liar.

The intent of Satan is to destroy human beings and keep them from the glorious destiny that God has in store for us and the methodology he uses is falsehood and deception: lies. That's why the truth is so important. That's why the truth as it comes to us in scripture and tradition and the teaching of the Church is so important. Who do we believe, who do we listen to, how do we form our minds and hearts? Scripture is the foundation, but scripture is protected and is carried forward in the life of the saints, in the life of the doctors, in the life of the fathers, and clarified for us on contemporary questions by the Magisterium.

Now listen to this, it talks about let no one seduce you: "By every seduction the wicked can devise for those destined to ruin." What the heck? Destined to ruin? Who's destined to ruin? I mean, we know that the Catholic Church has ruled out as a heresy double predestination. It isn't true that God has created some people destined for hell and other people destined for heaven. We know, and the Catholic Church

has clarified for us, that God wants the whole human race to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. How do you get destined to ruin if you start off destined for heaven? "By every seduction the wicked can devise for those destined to ruin because they have not opened their hearts to the truth in order to be saved." Therefore, as a consequence of saying no to the light that God is giving, as a consequence of having itching ears looking for teachers that tell them what they want to hear - which is a culpable action. You don't innocently, many times, fall into false thinking and deception. Somewhere deep in your heart you know it's false and you say yes to it anyway because it tickles the flesh. "Therefore, God is sending upon them a perverse spirit which leads them to give credence to falsehood so that all who have not believed the truth but have delighted in evil doing will be condemned." It's almost like Satan is going to be allowed to harvest those who belong to him. Those who have chosen to remain under his dominion, those who have said no to the truth.

How important it is, if we care about our children, our parents, our friends and relatives, that we not just care about them getting good jobs and having good health coverage but we care about their eternal salvation. We care that they get into the sun, the only place where there is eternal life and that they die in friendship with Christ rather than die unrepentant in their sins and unbelief. How important that we pray and we fast and we suffer and we love for the salvation of souls. And we're prepared to give a witness and a reason for the hope that is within us.

Ok, there are two particular deceptions that I'd like to mention that the Devil is particularly keen on. First of all, there's this amazing text in 1 Timothy Chapter 4. And remember what the Church says about Sacred Scripture: this is the truth about things, and it's a further conversion for us to conform our minds to the truth of things. This is not how most of us are used to think about things, but this is how things are. And what it means to be a Catholic Christian is to conform our minds to reality, conform our hearts and minds to the truth which is the only thing that will heal the wounds of the mind and the wounds of the soul and prepare us to see God face to face. Growth in holiness. 1st Timothy Chapter 4, the Spirit distinctly says, it wasn't a bad connection: "In later times, some will turn away from the faith and will heed deceitful spirits and things taught by demons through plausible liars." Did you ever hear that one?

If a demon wanted to influence people and he got up to teach something and his red tail popped out or the smell of sulfur started pervading the room, we'd probably be on our guard. That's not how they do it. They don't directly do this; they do it through willing instruments. Willing instruments who may not even know they're instruments of Satan. Cardinal Dulles gave a talk at our seminary a couple years ago and said there are priests who are blindly teaching that everybody goes to heaven and they're doing the devil's work even though they may not know it. You can do the devil's work without even knowing it unless you really are grounded in the truth.

So, there's a lot of falsehood in the Church, there's a lot of falsehood in the world. I'm going to pick out two lies. One is that God is not much concerned about these little personal things in our lives; he's mainly concerned about world peace, social justice and the environment. He's concerned about all those things, but listen to what he says about those little personal things in our life. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: "Do you not know," In another place, Paul says "you ignoramuses." It's a different world than we're

used to. It's more direct, more conflictive, bolder, and more confident. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived," Here's another area of deception, it's a huge area of deception: "Do not be deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." There are lots of people saying, no problem, God is so merciful that everyone is going to make it. Don't be deceived. Those who persist in serious personal sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. Don't be deceived.

The reason that Paul says don't be deceived is that he knows this will be a major area of deception. But here's the good news, "And such were some of you." you don't have to stay in this condition! "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." There's hope for people who have become slaves to sin! There was hope for St. Augustine. He says he actually was a slave to sin. He was responsible for having gotten to that point through a whole series of decisions he made over many of years, and by the time he wanted to get free, he couldn't! He had to cry out to God for mercy. And sometimes the deliverance comes instantly and sometimes it comes over a long period of time like it did for St. Augustine. So that's one lie.

The Second lie is this. If I were to describe how most of our even fellow Catholics look at the world today, I'd describe it like this: "Broad and wide is the way that leads to salvation and almost everybody is on that path, but narrow is the door and difficult is the road that leads to hell and hardly anyone is finding that." Now I know we're not in the Bible, but who can tell me what is wrong with this picture? It's backwards! And that is a remarkable sign of Satan's hoof. What he does is mock and hate the things of God. The black mass is the Mass said backwards. How did it ever happen that millions and millions of our fellow Catholics, without even realizing it, have come to accept as Gospel truth, something that is just the opposite of Gospel truth? By little tiny acceptances of lies that add up to a big lie. Unfortunately, through plausible liars; through people who wear deodorant, through people who have danced to grease, people maybe dressed fashionably. Not me...

What does Jesus say Matthew Chapter 7:13-14: "Broad and wide is the path that leads to destruction and many are traveling that way. But narrow is the door that leads to life, difficult the road and few there are who are finding it." Now Jesus didn't say this because this is how it has to be. Jesus didn't say this because he's happy about the situation. In fact, we know he was weeping. He's sitting on the hillside looking at his own city and weeping because so many people had closed themselves off to the truth he had witnessed to in his life, his miracles and his words. He was weeping. And he knew there were going to be consequences. Consequences on this earth and eternal consequences. He saw the Roman armies arriving; he saw sieges being laid upon the city. Thirty seven years later the Roman Emperor's son, Titus, arrived and literally laid siege to the city and left not a stone standing on a stone and dispersed the Jewish people to the four corners of the earth.

Now people say, "Ralph, haven't you heard that people can be saved without hearing the Gospel?" I've heard that. It's possible, but listen to exactly what the Church says from Lumen Gentium 16, section 60, I'm going to end with this, that's the constitution of the Church in the Second Vatican Council: "Those

who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience, these too may achieve eternal salvation.” SO under certain conditions it’s possible for people to be saved without hearing the Gospel. What are the conditions? Inculpable ignorance of the Gospel. It’s not their fault that they don’t know the Gospel. I’ve had the experience sometimes, maybe you have to, where you want to tell somebody the Gospel and they don’t want to hear it because they know what they’re going to hear. Second condition is, they are sincerely trying to know who God is. They perceive him in the physical universe and they want to know who God is and what his will is. They are trying to find out. Third condition, they are living according to the light that God has given to their conscience, Romans chapter 2 talks about that, assisted by grace. Nobody can really live the moral law except assisted by grace.

So, this is very well known, this teaching, but the last three sentences of this section are virtually ignored through the skill of the demons. What are the last three sentences of section 16? “But, very often, deceived by the evil one,” This is Vatican II! “...human beings have become foolish in their thinking and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the creator. Or, else living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Therefore, to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the Church, mindful of the lord’s command to preach the gospel to every creature, is zealous to carry out his work of evangelization.” This is very parallel to what Vatican I and Humani Generis and Pope Pius XII says about reason. Theoretically it’s possible, in practice it’s difficult. Theoretically it’s possible for somebody to come into contact with the only one who has eternal life without hearing the gospel by sincerely seeking God and opening themselves to the grace that will help them live according to the Gospel. But in practice it’s very difficult and very often it doesn’t happen. Therefore this strange thing that has happened has to be reversed. People have heard about the possibility of people being saved without hearing the Gospel and then a strange demonic connection comes into your mind and says, “Oh, we don’t have to worry about those people, they must all be saved!” It’s not true!

Just as it’s difficult for human reason to persist in the search without the darkness of mind and heart corrupting it, so it’s difficult for people who haven’t heard the Gospel to fulfill these conditions as the Vatican says, because the world, the flesh and the devil are mightily pounding on them to get them not to seek God and not to live according to the light of conscience. And therefore for them to be saved they need to hear the good news about forgiveness of sins and repentance and be called to belief and be called to faith, and be called to the Eucharist, and be called to Baptism, and be called to the Church and live under the lordship of Christ and the Catholic Church rather than under the dominion of Satan. So, that’s what’s going on. Praise the Lord.