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Intercession: Spiritual Warfare during Ministry

■ Cyril John

The Kargil War fought from May to July 1999 between my country, India, and our neighbour Pakistan; was named Operation Vijay. The war lasted for 50 days and according to the Indian Government was necessitated because Pakistan had illegally occupied part of our territory in the border area. It was, in fact, a bold attempt to regain territory that had always belonged to India and was at that time under Pakistani occupation. Something similar happens in the spiritual realm where spiritual warfare becomes necessary.

The whole universe was created by God and “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). However, slowly and steadily the evil one succeeded in wielding his influence on people, families, places, organizations, movements, governments and even nations as a whole. The war that began in heaven between the two kingdoms (Rev 12:7-12) continues to be waged until now. St. Peter alerts us: “Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (1Pet 5:8). What we need to do, is to detect the Enemy and his wiles and not give in to fear or hysteria that looks for demons in every situation.

The spiritual war

Those who have experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and committed their lives to Jesus anew, invariably seem to be confronted by the active assault of Satan in direct or subtle temptations. “For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The King James Version uses a more apt word for ‘struggle’: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood...” The conflict involves every baptized Christian – not only certain specialized groups, such as priests, missionaries, evangelists, etc. Spiritual warfare is something that all of us are engaged in. The ministry of Jesus and his followers throws much light on the work of Satan, his kingdom and his strategies. We need to know that spiritual warfare is not about chasing out demons. It refers to spiritual activity that you and I must engage in, against the nefarious designs of the evil one and his army, targeted against God and His children.

Intercession is Spiritual Warfare

Intercession in the true sense is spiritual warfare, irrespective of whether the intercessor is conscious of it or not. Someone defined intercession as “Holy believing, persevering prayer whereby someone pleads with God on behalf of another or others who desperately need God’s intervention”. The intercessor actually builds the wall or stands in the breach before the Lord on behalf of the land or its people (Ezek 22:30). By standing in the breach an intercessor facilitates the process

of regaining the land or its people under illegal occupation or influence of the evil one. The intercessor also protects them by building a wall. I was able to understand the significance of this Bible passage and its connection with the ministry of intercession when I paid a visit to the Great Wall of China, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, on the 21st of March, 2009. The Wall with a length of 6,400 kilometres, thickness up to 9 meters and height up to 7.5 meters, was built over a span of 2,100 years to protect the people of Northern China from the Mongolians and other invaders. Through prayer, the intercessor too builds a wall (like the Great Wall of China) to safeguard the people of God from the onslaught of the enemy.

St. Paul asks us to join him in his “struggle”, for the sake of the Gospel, saying: “I urge you, (brothers) by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the struggle by your prayers to God on my behalf” (Rom 15:30). The struggle that he speaks of is against the powers of darkness. This gives us an important Scriptural instruction that the prayer of intercession is, undoubtedly, part of an intense struggle against the powers of darkness. Paul has a clear understanding that he is not fighting “against flesh and blood but against the powers of darkness...” (Eph 6:12). Hence, for us to intercede effectively as missionaries, we must train as soldiers do for a battle.

The Enemy

In a war it is important that we must know the enemy—his strengths and strategies. The enemy in spiritual warfare is Satan and his evil spirits. The Bible passages, Rev 12:7-12, 17 and 2Pet 2:4 along with those of the fall of the king of Babylon in Is 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-17 have formed the basis for the Church Fathers’ teachings that Satan and his evil spirits were angels who lost their place in heaven through sin. During his General Audience on 15 November 1973, responding to the query, “What are the greatest needs of the Church today? Pope Paul VI said: “Do not let our answer surprise you as being over-simplistic, superstitious or unreal. One of the greatest needs is defence from that evil which is called the Devil”. It is quite obvious that the Church is in continuous spiritual warfare with Satan and his evil forces. At the same time we shouldn’t forget the fact that through His death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the enemy already: “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15).

The Warrior

Each one of us must be a warrior in this spiritual warfare. But why does God need us in the battle? The dominion that was under Satan has been restored to us by Jesus (Col 1:13-14). In spite of this, God will not exercise His authority in a realm given to us and will intervene only when invited by us in prayer (Ezek 22:30; Eph 6:18; 1Tim 2:1-4). The more involved we are in



Intercession: Gifts and charisms in service *(continued)*

the ministry of intercession, the more staunch a warrior we will be!

The Battlefield

Where does the enemy engage in battle? “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). The battlefield, therefore, is our mind. This is the arena where Satan and his forces constantly wage war in order to gain control over our thoughts, convictions, decisions and imagination (2 Cor 10:3-6). We witness this all around us these days.

Warrior’s Protection

Every Christian has to put on the armour of God if he or she is to survive the onslaughts of the enemy, much less go to attack. St Paul warns us to protect ourselves with the full armour of God. What then is this armour of God that protects us? “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:10-17).

The letter to Ephesians was written by Paul between 58 and 60 AD from the prison in Rome. He takes a Roman Legionary of his day, who must have been guarding him, and showcases the six pieces of armour the legionary normally wears. Today, tourists can see people displaying the six pieces of armour, as they stand outside the prison in Rome. What the Roman legionary wears

is compared by Paul to spiritual endowments for equipping oneself for spiritual warfare. The first five are defensive armour and the last one — sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God — is both defensive and offensive.

The Weapons

In order to win the war, it is absolutely essential that the warrior should go on the offensive. The weapons at the disposal of the warrior are:

The weapon of prayer: “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication” (Eph 6:18)

The weapon of praise: “Let the high praises of God be in their throats...” (Ps 149:6-9)

The weapon of proclamation of the Word: there is tremendous power in the Word of God and it invariably accomplishes its mission (Is 55:11; Jer 23:29; Heb 4:12).

Conclusion

From the daily events of our own personal lives and those of the holy ones; to the complex working of groups, governments and organizations, it is obvious that Satan and his evil spirits devise ways to creep in almost everywhere and try to wield influence. Therefore, those who want to live a fruitful and holy Christian life must recognize the reality of the existence and the strategies of Satan and check and defeat it in the power and authority of Lord Jesus. Explaining the phenomenon of spiritual warfare, St. Ignatius of Loyola said: “Against this (divine) plan the devil hurls himself. He is the chief enemy and the implacable foe. Ever since the days of the terrestrial paradise, he has not ceased to tempt men in order to destroy them. His tactics are known; even though he succeeds in making countless victims, his procedure can be easily defined in three words: point of attack well chosen, secret operations, and an assault all the more furious where the resistance lacks energy... Vigilance, therefore, is indispensable, together with the steady resolution of always doing the opposite of what he proposes. There lie wisdom and salvation”.

Love in Action: Healing

■ Robert Canton

In Exodus 15:26, the Word of God says, I, the Lord, am your Healer”. In the book of Luke 7:20-23, “When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” At that time, He cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; He also granted sight to many who were blind. And He said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,

the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me”.

Jesus, the Divine Physician

Jesus Christ is a Miracle Worker par excellence. He is called the Divine Physician and the Master Healer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that “Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that “God has visited His



people” and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of” (1504). In the booklet published by ICCRS entitled *Guidelines For Prayer For Healing*, we read, “The meeting between Christ and the sick, is, both in the Gospels and still today, to heal the person in his or her totality, and hence with a dimension of eternity”.

Types of Healing

According to the *Guidelines For Prayer For Healing*, there are four basic categories of healing, namely physical healing; psychological healing; the healing of wounds to the human psyche; spiritual healing; this means, above all, the “healing from sin” that restores a person to a relationship with God; and exorcism and deliverance. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1673), states, “Exorcism is directed at the expulsion or the deliverance from demonic possession through spiritual authority which Jesus entrusted to the Church,” “while prayer for deliverance is directed to God, asking God to free someone from the evil spirits,” per the *Guidelines For Prayer For Healing*.

The Ministry of Healing in the CCR

In the CCR, the Lord has raised up many men and women, members of the clergy, the religious and lay people, who have very active ministry of healing. In my humble capacity as a minister of healing, I can say that praying for the sick is one of the most effective tools for evangelization. I have witnessed people who came to know the loving and the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ through the healing ministry. In a Healing Rally which I had conducted in San Francisco, California—a lady who was paralyzed from the waist down, came out of her wheelchair, totally healed. Later on, she testified that her healings had made her closer to the Lord.

How to Pray For Healing and Achieve Results


Any baptized Christian can pray for healing. The following are some of the suggested steps on praying for healing. This list is by no means exhaustive nor exclusive:

1. Have a constant and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Without this kind of relationship with the Lord, there can be no real power in one’s life. In John 15:5; 7, Jesus asserts, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”.
2. Avail yourself with the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist as often as possible because through these Sacraments, we encounter the Master Healer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1509) states, “The

Church believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the Physicians of souls and bodies. This presence is particularly active through the Sacraments, and in an altogether special way through the Eucharist, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health”.

3. Have an expectant faith. “I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you”.
4. Ask pertinent questions and listen attentively to the person you are ministering before you start to pray. Information about the sick person may guide you on how to proceed to pray for the sick.
5. Lay hands on the sick. Jesus laid hands on the sick, and He healed them. Allow the power of the Lord to flow through your hands into the sick person.
6. Use the Name of Jesus. “If you ask anything of me in my Name, I will do it” (John 14:14).
7. Be open to the Holy Spirit and His gifts, especially prophecy, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and discernment of spirits.
8. Obey the voice of the Lord. “Obedience is better than sacrifice, submission than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22).
9. “Call the things that are not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17) I personally call it as a “build up prayer”. For instance—a prayer asking the Lord for brand new eardrum for a deaf person, brand new eyes for the blind, etc.
10. Apply by faith the precious blood and the healing touch of Jesus into the diseased areas of the person’s body.
11. Seal the healing with the blood and the Name of Jesus so that the healing may last. “By His stripes we were healed” (Isa. 53:5).
12. Pray a “cleansing” or protective prayer to prevent transference of spirits such as spirit of affliction into the person praying and the people around him.
13. Invoke the Holy Angels to continue to minister to the sick.
14. Give praise to God’s goodness and His healing love. “Give praise for His mighty deeds, praise Him for His great majesty” (Psalms 150:2).

Conclusion

Jesus was a Healer par excellence because He was filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that we too, will become more like Jesus in every way. 



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QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission is headed by Bp. Joseph Grech (Australia) and is formed by Fr. Peter Hocken (Austria), Fr. Francis Martin (USA), and Dr. Mary Healy (USA). The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission is in consultation with theologians from around the world.

What is Resting in the Spirit?

What is resting in the Spirit? Should it be a cause of concern for renewal leaders? In this response, I share my own experience as a leader in renewal and my reflection as a theologian. These comments apply to all unusual phenomena, of which resting in the Spirit is one of the most common.

My experience (and that of many others) is that when we pray in faith for deeper reception of the Holy Spirit, profound things can begin to happen in people, which may be manifested in laughter, weeping or groaning. These are natural human responses to the overwhelming presence and grace of the Holy Spirit. Over the years I have learned that there are often deep hurts in people, even in those who outwardly appear to be excellent and mature Catholics. I remember how an organizing leader for a conference began to weep; it slowly came out that this leader had been seriously abused in childhood. This painful memory had been suppressed for many years. Today more and more people come from broken homes with little or no experience of loving parents. Some have learned to cope with life, and others have not. The latter are obviously wounded, but the former may look normal and balanced. But when we pray for the Holy Spirit's deep work, these things begin to surface. In my judgment, this is a good way to understand the benefits of resting in the Spirit. Resting in the Spirit happens when people being prayed for can no longer stand or sit, and they fall back or slide to the floor, and rest on their backs. In the vast majority of cases, resting in the Spirit is very peaceful.

When anything unusual starts to happen, the key question is not how unusual it is. The key question is what is happening spiritually in the person. Often the more unusual things happen when we are praying for a further opening to the Holy Spirit and for the Holy Spirit to work deep healing and sanctification in the person's life. If we sincerely ask the Father to pour out his Spirit, we should believe that this is what He will give. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13).

How should leaders handle resting in the Spirit and other unusual phenomena? The most important need is for wise and mature leadership, together with solid teaching that is both biblical and faithful to the age-old tradition of the Church. When these two elements are present, there is nothing to fear from unusual phenomena. Why? First, wise leaders will quickly recognize anything that is out of order. They will detect when people's focus is not on the Lord and there is something wrong with their motivation and their attitude (for example, a focus


on emotional excitement). Second, mature leaders will provide sound teaching, which helps to ensure that when people come forward for prayer, they are seeking a deeper union with God and a greater submission to the Lordship of Jesus. There is a close connection between what is taught and what is sought, between teaching and subsequent experience.

Where a person has deep hurts, things may happen that can be disturbing to others, e.g. a time of shaking; in this case, the leaders should calmly take the person to a separate space where prayer can continue without disruption of the meeting. The fact that the immediate effect of prayer is not peaceful is not a negative sign; pain and emotional hurt are coming to the surface. But such prayer should then lead into peace, as the Lord heals deep places within.

What could be the dangers of this resting? What could be the benefits? A danger is that people can come forward for prayer seeking an experience rather than seeking the Lord. The answer to this is good teaching that emphasizes seeking the Lord and not particular experiences. The potential benefit is that people can receive healing for long-hidden hurts; others receive deep experiences of the Lord's love and mercy. I remember one man who was taken through the whole Passion of the Lord while resting in the Spirit.

In regard to "falling," my observation is that in genuine cases this is a form of surrender, as if the person says, "Over to you, Lord," letting go of the self-possession that keeps the Lord at a safe distance. "Falling" is only a means to an end and is not important in itself. It is the surrender that is important, for we are allowing the Holy Spirit to work at levels beyond our conscious control. How do we know that we are not opening ourselves to alien forces? The context makes all the difference: when the context is authentic worship of the Lord, with real faith in his goodness and grace, then the Father will not give us a stone.

Falling down and getting up after one minute is not a fruitful exercise. This is the most common problem that I see: people think that falling is the key thing, and so they put the emphasis in the wrong place. The terminology of "being slain in the Spirit" should be avoided. That places the emphasis on the phenomenon of falling and introduces a violent image that is not appropriate.

Why is all this happening today? Maybe it is because we live in an increasingly noisy and frenetic society where people have little time to reflect, to relax and to just be. This may explain why people may need to stop all activity, stop straining and just let go and yield themselves to the work of the Spirit. 

ICCRS receives many questions about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and we do our best to answer as many as we can with the help of the ICCRS Doctrinal Commission members who kindly take the time to check their references and credit their sources. The questions and answers featured in this section of the Leadership Formation each issue are selected for their relevancy and helpfulness overall for those involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org
