

The Catholic Church the world over is undergoing some turmoil and division. Pope Francis says this should not be surprising as it is the role of Satan to divide people and cause confusion. In fact, our word “devil” comes from the Greek word “diabolos”—the one who divides.

In addition to human weakness and sinfulness behind divisions in the Church, Pope Francis sees a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil at work touching men and women in our time. To counteract these, he has proposed spiritual remedies.

Spiritual practices that aid people in unsettling times are prayer and fasting in repentance for personal sins. Another step is to make reparation for the sins committed against God’s commandments and the dignity of the human person by silent prayer, adoration and sacrificial giving to benefit others.

Pope Francis has personally asked us to embrace a particular spiritual means in this month of October by reciting the rosary daily. The rosary is a series of prayers addressed to God the Father and the Virgin Mary, along with meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ and His Blessed Mother.

At the conclusion to the rosary, the pope urged Catholics to add two invocations: a special prayer to Mary and another to the Archangel Saint Michael. The Bible repeatedly depicts Saint Michael winning by God’s power a titanic battle in heaven—described in the Book of Daniel (10.13–21; 12.1) and the Book of Revelation (12.7–9). God’s people on earth share in the struggle. The enemy is the Dragon.

The Holy Father asked the faithful of the entire world to pray that the Holy Mother of God place the Church beneath her protective mantle. We are to implore her to preserve the Church from attacks by the devil, “the great accuser.” We are also to ask her intercession to make members of the Church more aware of the faults, the errors, and the abuses committed recently and in the past, so that, being converted, evil may no longer prevail over us.

The rosary would then conclude with the prayer written by Pope Leo XIII: “Saint 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, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.”

Several bishops in the United States, in response to the many molestations by priests and concealments by bishops, have encouraged the faithful of their dioceses to take up the Prayer to Saint Michael at the conclusion of each parish Mass. Churchgoers have been supportive of this practice.

The Bishops of Ontario discussed favourably the possibility of adopting this practice in their respective dioceses. Accordingly, I am inviting pastors in the Ottawa and Cornwall dioceses to introduce this practice in their churches beginning on December 2, the First Sunday of Advent.

Some liturgists are concerned that this prayer may blur the line between divine worship and devotions. However, the celebrant will separate the prayer from the Mass by reciting it after the dismissal of the assembly before or after the final hymn.

The struggle that the Church faces now has both a temporal and a spiritual component. Previously, I wrote about the work already underway to create safe environments in our parishes. But we must also seek spiritual assistance in this battle against malign forces. My hope is parishes joining together using this traditional prayer appealing to God for the intercession of Saint Michael will be encouraged and helped towards renewal, healing and safeguarding the most vulnerable among us.

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