

False Prophets

In our consideration of the Signs provided by Our Lord through Sacred Scripture and His Church which are intended to alert us to the fact that the end of the present age is at hand, we have so far examined

- 1) **apostasy**, or the world-wide final falling away from God, the Church, and morality and
- 2) the phenomenon of **globally applied pressures**, both political and commercial, aimed at forcing everyone to conform to an anti-God, anti-Church, and anti-morality style of life.

Today we will consider the phenomenon of **False Prophets** which in and of itself is nothing new. But, as we shall see, what IS new as “the last days” approach is their great success in drawing believers out of the Church, and non-believers away from the Church, by means of the extraordinary pretended “signs and wonders” which they are permitted to perform through the power of Satan.

We now turn back once again to what is sometimes referred to as the “Little Apocalypse” of Jesus as reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Jesus is reacting to his disciples’ extravagant remarks about the magnificence of the Temple by assuring them that it would one day be a pile of ruins. As Matthew tells it, the disciples were shocked at this and later asked Jesus in private: *“Tell us when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”* From the wording of their question we can see that in their mind the destruction of the Temple, the Lord’s second coming, and the close of the age were closely connected in time.

Jesus begins by warning them not to be misled into thinking that every piece of bad news means that the end is in sight. He then names the various upheavals which must take place before these events occur, among them the appearance of imposters claiming to be Christ who “will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:5). “All this is but the beginning of sufferings,” (24:8) he assures them. After this, comes a passage which can only refer to the 3rd part of their question, to “the close of the age”.

*“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. **And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.** And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.” (24:9-14)*

In St. Mark’s Gospel (13:21-23) the following words of Our Lord pertinent to our theme are found at this point:

*“And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there He is!’ do not believe it. For **false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.** But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand.”*

It is significant that Jesus warns us of “false Christs”, suggesting that they are a satanic imitation of Himself, with this difference: the “imitation Christs” offer us a salvation that promises us everything we fallen sinners think we want, whereas the true Christ offers us a

salvation that brings us only what God knows we really need. The true Christ conquers sin. The imitation Christs cater to it. What all the wiles of the devil could not succeed in tempting Jesus to do by appealing to his personal desires, the evil one is much more successful in achieving with us by using the same tactics.

To be sure, this temptation has been with us ever since Adam and Eve fell for it, but as the end draws near (13:24-27) it is occurring on a grand scale.

St. Paul sees it the same way. *“The man of lawlessness, the son of perdition”* who will *“take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”* operates in the meantime under a restraint. When the restraint is removed he will show his true colours. Satan will work through him *“with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”* (2Thessalonians 2)

We recall also St. Paul’s vivid description of what the world will look like *“in the last days”* when the great majority of people will love pleasure rather than God and keep the form of the faith while denying its power. Teachers in those days will cater to what people want to hear to such a degree that whole segments of the Church will *“turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.”* (2 Timothy 3 and 4) Such teachers, especially if they present themselves as speaking in the name of the Church, can well be described as “false prophets”.

In the Revelation to St. John we meet **the** False Prophet, identified by the Church as the “man of lawlessness” referred to by St. Paul, who is revealed after all restraints on him have been removed. He is now free to

gather into himself and to perfect all the ploys used by all the lesser false prophets over the years so as to create “a strong delusion” calculated to make those who “take pleasure in unrighteousness...believe what is false.” (2 *Thessalonians* 2) Our greatest protection against him is, then, not to take pleasure in unrighteousness or to believe what is false. This is most easily achieved simply by being a **faithful** Catholic.

Revelation 13 introduces us to what has sometimes been called the satanic trinity.

Satan (the dragon) = God the Father.

The beast like a leopard = God the Son.

The beast like a lamb = God the Holy Spirit.

Last week we saw how the “beast like a leopard”, on behalf of the dragon, dazzles the whole world and gains a political and commercial stranglehold on the human race, inducing people to believe that the Church is the enemy to be eliminated. Everyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life of the “Lamb who has been Slain” will, in fact, find it easy to accord total worship and allegiance to that beast.

The only missing component at this point is a religion that makes people feel good about all this. Here’s where the False Prophet enters the picture, depicted as a “beast like a lamb” (13:11-18).

Presuming to be speaking on behalf of God, he mouths all the smooth lies of the dragon, God’s archenemy. Now, this is not stuff that sounds craven and evil, easily identifiable as coming from Satan. It feels right because it is a natural extension of who we human beings are already when we live in denial of God, as Jesus so tellingly points out in *Matthew 16:23*. It’s what we want to hear, not what we need to hear.

This beast's sole function is to prop up the first beast. It is religion at the service of the state. And it has an impressive array of signs and wonders at its disposal precisely for the purpose of deceiving gullible people, "small and great, rich and poor, free and slave", into believing that the new religion is vastly better than what the Church has to offer. It endorses "for humanitarian reasons" the other beast's law that everyone who expects to do business in the world or to derive any benefits from government programs must bear on their body "the mark of the beast". Those who refuse to bear this mark, a sort of caricature of the mark of Baptism found on the foreheads of the saints (*Rev. 7:3*), lose everything.

All of this culminates soon in a final conflict between the hosts of Heaven and the hosts of Hell in which "*the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he had deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.*" (*Revelation 19:20*)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up the essence of the False Prophet's work in modern society in these words:

The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.

The spirit of our times is exceedingly vulnerable to the influence of the False Prophet. It could be termed, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, a

“...dictatorship of relativism that recognizes nothing as definite and which leaves as the ultimate measure of right and wrong the ego and personal desires of each individual. Those who have a clearly defined faith according to the Credo of the Church are labeled as fundamentalists. The only attitude acceptable by today’s standards is a relativism which forces us to be ‘tossed to and fro and swept along by every wind of teaching’” (*Eph. 4:14*).

Dr. Kelly Bowring has done us a real service in bringing together the teachings and insights from Scripture and other credible Catholic sources in regard to these matters. We may assess the credibility of a few of those sources differently from him, but this does not detract from the overall value of his primary work in this area, which carries an “Imprimatur” for its doctrinal content, which is not an endorsement of all his sources.

He cites Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s insight into the nature of the Antichrist and of his counter-church, stating:

In the midst of his seeming love for humanity and his glib talk of freedom and equality, he will have one great secret which he will tell no one: he will not believe in God. Because his religion will be brotherhood without the fatherhood of God, he will deceive even the elect. He will set up a counter-church which will be the ape of the Church, but in reverse and emptied of its divine content. It will be a mystical body of the Antichrist that will is all externals resemble the mystical body of Christ... Then will be verified a paradox: the very objections with which men of the 19th century rejected the Church will be the reasons why they now accept the

counter-church – it will claim to be infallible when its visible head speaks definitively.

How can we who desire to be faithful to Jesus know that this deceiver is really the Antichrist, the False Prophet, Satan in disguise?

In his new religion, the Ten Commandments are all reversed.

In his new religion, the Beatitudes are back in the front.

As for his “pretended signs and wonders”, his “healings”, though spectacular at times, are of short duration and temporary, and they always lead to worse conditions than before.

There is no peace in his presence, only an agitated and unsettled spirit, a sense of threat, a pall of fear and intimidation.

The effect of all this on society, and the Christian’s place in society, has probably never been better expressed than by St Anthony the Great of the Egyptian Desert:

“A time is coming when men will go mad,
and when they see someone who is not mad,
they will attack him saying,
‘You are mad, you are not like us.’”