

## SATAN'S CHALLENGE

Fr. Alexander

This is the story of a man who, in five decisive seconds, lost everything he treasured in life – his wife, his son, and his daughter, his career, and his peace of mind. They vanished before his eyes, and his only goal was to wander aimlessly from street to street, looking for alcohol, his face drenched in tears.

I first saw this man in the restaurant of a hotel. The police were called, to escort him out, so as not to disturb the guests of the hotel. The next day, I recognized him in the local market place, dressed in the same clothes and, again, with tears in his eyes. I went and asked him whether he was the person the police had escorted out of the hotel. His answer was yes, he was, and that this was a regular event.

My next question was whether he was willing to say why he was in tears. He was surprised by my interest. He said, “You are the first person to ask; all the rest think that I cry in drunkenness. So, they call the police, and I am always escorted out.” I asked whether he would accept to be my guest at lunch. He said that this could not happen as he was well known, and the police would soon appear and escort him away. I went into the restaurant and inquired. The owner said that he would serve him, if I accepted responsibility for a drunkard.

Here is the man's story. He was a school teacher. He was well educated, and spoke in polite and elegant terms. He always went into that hotel because, years in the past, the hotel owner was his best student. From his best student he expected respect; but his appearance unsettled the guests, and the hotel owner always had him escorted out.

This teacher's wife had spent months in hospital, in a coma, but she came out of the coma, and the whole family went to drive her home. The teacher was there in his car, the son and the daughter also came in another car, and the question was in which car the mother would return home. The teacher did not want the son to drive, because he had sensed alcohol on the son's breath, and alcohol made the son drive daringly (taking risks that the teacher did not trust). Even so, the son insisted, he was a driving-school instructor, and was not likely to endanger the health of his mother or of his sister.

The mother and daughter agreed. The son told his father that he was not drunk, that he was only “comfortable,” that the father should not be so old-fashioned, that everyone drinks, and that a little alcohol has never hurt anyone.

The two cars set for home. The teacher followed them in his car. The father froze when he saw his son taking the wrong ramp onto the freeway. The son took the exit ramp and tried to drive against the on-coming traffic. In no time, the father heard a huge crash, followed by a second crash, a third, a fourth, and a fifth crash. Within seconds, his son's car was hit five times at freeway speeds. As the teacher was told later, his wife, son, and daughter died on impact.

This event was ever before his eyes, day and night. He was not able to fathom how the happiest

day of his life turned into a tragedy of such magnitude. His question to me was: Why did God allow such a disaster to strike him and his family?

Here is what we need to keep in mind. Satan had challenged Christ to prove the central issue of his life and mission: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread” (Matthew 4:3), and again, “If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple” (Matthew 4:6). Christ did not accept that challenge. Had he done that, he would have provided the handle that Satan needed.

In the case of the teacher's son, Satan threw a challenge at him – again, on the central claim of his expertise: “If you are such an expert driver, let me see you maneuver the vehicle against on-coming traffic,” and the man with alcohol on his brain, accepted the challenge. Perhaps pride entered his thoughts, and he set out to prove his worth. It was another stunt, that the father had feared (from the intoxication). It also tempted God. After all, what are the odds that anyone can succeed in such a challenge? Was he not gambling with the lives of three people?

What about the earlier dialog? “Dad, you are old fashioned, a little alcohol has not hurt anyone, I drank only to be comfortable, everyone does it, no big deal,” etc.

Millions today are in the same boat. The sins of our society are: the constant desire to be entertained, watching movies with inappropriate content, nakedness, drunkenness, drugs, anger, bad language, selfishness, and pride. The modern reasoning is not different: we need time to relax and enjoy life, computers and cell phones can provide all kinds of entertainment, I'll let my children do the same, smart phones make children smarter, etc.

In such situations, we sow seed, and whatever we sow, we expect to reap. The question we must pose to the unhappy father is: Where were you when your son came home drunk for the first time? Where were you when he pulled his first stunt? How did you react when your son was courting danger, playing with pistols, knives, fires, or threatening to kill someone?

Let us also ask the spouse that wants a divorce: How long have you known that your marriage has been steadily moving towards disaster? What did you do about it? We can pose the same question to those that contemplate leaving home, robbing a bank, experimenting with drugs, committing suicide, or steadily follow some other path to destruction.

The prodigal son was old enough to know that he had money coming to him – but he did not know how to use it. So, he threw away a portion of his life and would have perished had his hunger pangs not brought to mind that his father's servants fared better. The teacher's son, in a moment of pride, handed Satan the key to three lives, and Satan gladly took them.

The teacher's plight moves us to tears. Yet we know that, at every moment, we decide what we will reap. It is not enough to have the attitude that says: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” One must act accordingly, and not to accept the bait of Satan's challenge.