

Dealing with the Devil

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The words of Jesus Christ in Mark 13: 9-13 warn the disciples of difficult times to come.

The events He foretells are frightening: "They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues...And brother will deliver up brother to death and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for My name's sake."

But before telling them all these things, He urges the disciples to "take heed to yourselves," which is also translated as "watch out for yourselves" or "beware." This warning could simply mean that they must prepare for the trouble that is coming.

But it might also mean that they must be ready to face that trouble without letting it overcome them. The devil uses whatever he can to tempt us away from faith, and making us despair when we suffer unjustly for the faith can be one of his weapons. That is why Christ adds this promise to His warning: "But he who endures to the end will be saved."

A man who did allow the devil's temptation to overcome him. He is the monk Erasmus of the Kiev Caves. He came from a very wealthy family, and decided that the best way to spend his money was to beautify the monastery church with icons and precious relics. He used up his fortune doing this, and continued to live his personal life as a monk without possessions or wealth.

The devil found a way to use Erasmus' generous beautifying of the church against him by making him doubt what he had done. Why, the devil tempted him, didn't you use your money to help the poor?

What good is a beautiful church?

Erasmus allowed these evil questions to drive him into despair, which was his real sin. He drifted into an unhealthy, unfruitful way of living.

When he became deathly ill, his monastic brothers were sure that it was too late for him to repent. But the Mother of God appeared to him as he lay dying. She understood that he had wanted to honor her by making the church beautiful, and she assured him that he would be given time to repent, and would be received into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Church remembers another person who was tempted by the devil: Saint Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople. At the end of a life spent honorably serving God, he was attacked by demons trying to make him despair by accusing him of various sins. But rather than give in, he shouted back at them, "I am not guilty of that sin!" and flailed the air with his arms, driving them off. When he finally died, he was at peace and his face was radiant.

Whatever ways the devil finds to tempt us into despair, it's good to remember the promise of Christ: The person who endures to the end will be saved.

