

Each week for the summer, a parishioner will reflect on a section of Pope Francis' Call to Holiness: his new Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, which you can read at <http://w2.vatican.va>

Spiritual Combat against the Devil (paragraphs 158-165)

You may be surprised to learn that Pope Francis takes the reality of the Devil very seriously.

I say that because the Pope works hard, especially in paragraphs 159-162, to warn us against the temptation to treat the Devil as an old-fashioned, discredited notion: as a psychological projection, for example, or as a mere myth or superstition. The Pope does this, not to insist on Biblical literalism (as if the Devil is real just because the Bible says so) or because he wants us to think of an actual horned demon in a red suit, but because he wants us to absorb as best we can the true dimensions of the spiritual combat in which we're involved.

Words like "battle" and "combat" and "struggle" occur frequently in these paragraphs. "The Christian life is a constant battle," the Pope declares, one in which we need not only "strength and courage," but grace. In fact, we need grace above all, because the battle for our souls is being fought spiritually. "Nor can this battle be reduced to the struggle against our human weaknesses and proclivities...it is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil." Our souls are being fought for on a battleground stretching into infinity.

Infinite as this battleground may be, though, our weak and limited human souls have a crucial role to play in the struggle. For we really are capable, the Pope insists (§163-164), of opening ourselves to the grace against which not even the Devil can prevail.

—Deacon George Dardess