

Spiritual Fortress

Part II: Seek Refuge in the Fortress

In the last article, we discussed the concept of having a spiritual fortress and constructing an emergency plan to protect ourselves from the attack of the demons. The first step of the emergency plan is to flee from temptation, but where should one fleeing temptation go? In this article, we will discuss the second step of the emergency plan, which is to seek refuge inside the fortress just like the monks who used to take refuge in their fortresses when the barbarians attacked.

Once the monks were inside the fortress, the barbarians were unable to harm them due to the 1.5-meter-thick walls, which were impenetrable to any of the weapons of the enemy. If, however, a foolish monk fled to his cell or simply tried to outrun his pursuer, the barbarians would easily break in, catch, and murder him. The same is true in the spiritual life; those who try to flee from sin and quit their sinful habits by their own willpower are like the foolish monks who flee, but are eventually captured by their attackers. On the contrary, a wise person who flees from the devil and seeks protection in his fortress will be victorious over the evil one. The fortress is necessary as it provides protection and gives peace to the one being attacked. When we are inside our fortress, we can take a moment to exhale and to catch our breath from our rapid evacuation knowing that we are safe from our attackers.



For this reason, each one of us must surround our minds and hearts with an impenetrable spiritual wall that prevents sinful ideas from entering our thoughts. Our spiritual wall should function just like the walls found in the cells of our bodies. The purpose of the cell wall is to maintain the cell's shape, regulate nutrients in and out of the cell, and inhibit the entrance of harmful pathogens into the cell. In an analogous manner, our spiritual wall, which is based upon the divine teaching of the Bible and the Church, helps us to maintain and protect our integrity, morals, and values during these amorphous and evolving times.

The protective nature of the wall is illustrated in a beautiful story told by St. John the Short.

In one town there lived a beautiful woman, a harlot who had many lovers. A certain prince told her that he would take her as his wife if she promised that she would live honorably and faithfully in marriage. She promised this and the prince took her to his court and married her. However, her former lovers decided to turn her back to her former ways, and reclaim her for themselves. They dared not face the prince, so they went around the back of the palace and began to whistle. The woman heard the whistling, recognized it, and quickly stopped her ears. She hid in an inner chamber of the palace and locked the door behind her. Thus, she was delivered from new temptations. St. John explained this story in the following manner: "The harlot is the soul; her lovers are the passions; the prince is Christ; the inner chamber is the heavenly habitation; and the lovers who whistle and entice are the demons. If the soul would constantly turn from its passions and flee to God, then the passions and the demons would be frightened and flee from it."¹

Notice how the beautiful woman first fled by "quickly [stopping] her ears," and then she resorted to the safety and security of her fortress by "[hiding] in an inner chamber," and "[locking] the door behind her." Had the woman not resorted to her fortress, chances are she would have fallen into sin. Whenever we are under attack, we should be like this woman and flee to our inner chamber, which could be our prayer room or church. After all, the church is a fortress, a place of refuge, a hospital for the sick, and an ark that protects its passengers from the flood waters of this dangerous world. Hence, one who is battling sin should constantly be in the church where there is peace, security, salvation, and victory over the attackers of the soul.

In the next article, we will discuss the final step of the emergency action procedures.

¹ *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection.* (1984). (B. Ward, Trans.) Cistercian Publications.

Fr. David Hanna
fr.davidhanna@gmail.com