

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last week I was disturbed as I drove through town and saw that there was going to be a Medium doing psychic readings. The occult is real, and I want to say that it is very dangerous. The Bible and the teachings of the Church have always taught that we not to take part in occult activities. Many think that it is because they are frauds and we don't want to be "taken in" by them. True there are some frauds, but I'm not so worried about them. It is the real psychics that I worry most about. In today's second reading, St. Paul tells us to "**test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil**" (I Thessalonians 5:21-22). Not all spirits are good!

You see, the devil is real. I mean *real* real. He hates God and he hates all that God loves – that's us. He HATES YOU. He hates me. He is doing everything in his power to take people away from God, to have us reject God, or even just ignore God so we can go to Hell. He knows how to hide his ugliness. He masquerades as an angel of light (see II Corinthians 11:14) to draw us into his false beauty. He lures us, draws us. He pretends not to exist so that we don't think that there is anything really wrong with sin, evil and the occult. But involvement with the occult draws us away from God.

So what is the occult? The word occult refers to secret knowledge or power – taking part in the occult is seeking knowledge or power. It is a form of idolatry, since it shows a lack of trust in God, and seeks to grasp at power or knowledge. This comes in many forms. We see it with mediums and psychics, with Wicca, Tarot Cards, horoscopes and Ouija boards, just to name a few.

So how do we "test" the spirits, as St. Paul says? While each situation needs to be evaluated in light of authentic spirituality, the easiest "litmus test," so to speak, is from the first letter of St. John – anything that denies Jesus come in the flesh does not belong to God (I John 4:2-3). So if a spirituality can either "take Jesus or leave Him" – that it doesn't change whether you believe that Jesus is truly God and that He truly became man – then it isn't authentic spirituality from God and the Holy Spirit.

Take, for instance, Reiki. Reiki promises healing for us, but it uses spiritual energy for healing. The very name Reiki means "a supernatural force or spiritual intelligence, and life energy." It is of itself calling on spiritual energy. There are only two sources of spiritual energy – God and the devil. To practice Reiki, you can believe in God... or not; believe that Jesus is Lord... or not. Using St. John's litmus test, it is not authentic (from God) spirituality.

Take another spirituality – Yoga. I know I just lost a bunch of people here. You're probably saying, "Father, Yoga?! Seriously?! It's just a form of stretching exercise!" It is much more than that. Traditional Yoga is Hindu in origin. The various positions actually are positions honoring the Hindu gods. Now, just to be clear, you CANNOT be both Hindu and Christian. It is a direct contradiction. Hindus believe in many gods. Christians believe there is only one God. A Trinity (three persons), but only ONE God. The "stretching" exercises actually, by their nature, are giving homage to pagan deities. We cannot worship both the One God and many gods. Those other gods are not gods at all, but fallen angels, which we call demons. Also, the meditation exercises which have us "blank out" (for lack of a better word) our mind are dangerous, for they open ourselves to external spiritual influences. (As an aside, Christian meditation always has an active mind – pondering over the mysteries of the Faith.)

Why do I bring this up? As spiritual father of this community, I am concerned. When we begin looking to things other than God, we turn away from Him. When we put our eyes on something or someone as our hope, we take our eyes off God. God has promised to guard us, to protect us, to keep us close to Him, to feed us daily with His supersubstantial bread, to be the fulfillment of all our desires. But when we wander away, we leave His protection; He will not force us to stay with Him. It is dangerous for our souls to get involved with the occult in any way, whether it be a medium doing psychic readings, or any other form of the occult.

Many will reject this teaching, saying that I'm not with the times or I'm superstitious. Some will say I have not made the argument very well. I write this as a father who is concerned for his children. I write this as a shepherd who sees the wolf and warns the sheep to stay away. Whether I have been eloquent or not is beside the point: this is the teaching of the Church, and as Catholics deserves to be heeded. If we disagree with a teaching of the Church, we have a moral obligation to research it, so we can know why the Church teaches what she teaches. I encourage you to read the document put out by the United States Conference of Catholic bishops (www.usccb.org search "reiki"), as well as a book called *Yoga, Tai Chi and Reiki: A Guide for Christians* by Max Sculley (available from Amazon and Barnes and Noble).