

Twenty-first Sunday After Trinity 2024
Eph. 6:10-17 (ESV)

“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed Lord’s Day to all of you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we hear in our Epistle lesson strong admonition for us today; today we hear St. Paul speaking of things we may hardly ever think about or even be aware of. Today we, of course, hear things we *need* to hear and things we need to do—among them, to put on the armor of God, to be strong in the Lord, and with these things to stand firm and withstand—a point emphasized not once, not twice, but *four* times here in just a few verses.

Dear ones, through St. Paul as His messenger, the Lord of Hosts and the Commander of the armies of heaven calls us to do battle in the Spirit, He calls us to wage spiritual war. There’s no two ways about it. And now is not the time for us to shrink back in fear. Now is not the time to desert our post and flee, as if that will do us any good. No.

Now is the time for courage and resolve, for every last one of us—every Christian man, woman, and child to listen well to the voice of our Commander, and for us to serve with honor as the soldiers of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, just before our text appointed for today, St. Paul by divine inspiration, gives us instructions according to our station, particularly in the domestic estate. In Ephesians 5 and early on in chapter 6, he gives us our duties and, if you will, our marching orders according to our post, according to our station in the home—so that there would be unity and harmony in the home.

But as you know, doing what we ought to do, working as a team, as a single cohesive unit, is far easier said than done.

I remember when I was barely 18 years old in boot camp preparing for active-duty service in the Air Force. And back then, for me and many others in my unit, learning to work together and even just marching as one was a real task. Maybe you can relate.

Truth be told, early on, I bristled at some of the commands given me very loudly by my drill sergeants. My body wasn’t accustomed to moving the way I was commanded to move. My mind was rebellious, and sadly I came to resent some of my brothers with me who had trouble obeying commands themselves—who would go left when told go right, who would bump into each other and into me and get us all yelled at and doing pushups for our trouble. Those were the good ol’ days.

But the truth is, if we didn’t get it together and obey as we were commanded and work together as one, what chance would we have in the chaos of the battlefield when faced with the enemy, when the mission was on the line, and lives were at stake? What chance would we have?

So too, dear ones, when you hear the orders and commands given you through St. Paul, what is your knee-jerk reaction?

“Wives,” he says, “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”

“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

“Fathers...bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

What is your response to all these?

Well, if these orders cause you to bristle and want to desert your post and abandon your God-given duties in the home, then let St. Paul show you the forces set against you and your family and the Church as a whole, forces you’re up against as Christians.

In the first place, as St. Paul says, you have the devil himself, the prince of darkness, plotting your destruction as a cunning, wily enemy—one very capable and practiced in his ancient craft. And as you heard at the beginning of my homily, we also have warring against us “the cosmic powers over this present darkness...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

These are far from idle, insignificant foes to reckon with. The demonic hordes assembled against you are vast. They are vicious and voracious, and they have nothing to lose.

Victory for them is to cause chaos and division, certainly in the home and elsewhere, to pit one against another and both against God, and thus to make us participants in their own ruin, both now and in the age to come.

From the perspective of the demons, if they can deceive wives into thinking that submitting to their husbands is misogyny—perfect. Everything on that front is going according to plan.

Again, from the perspective of the demons, if husbands can be deceived into thinking that loving their wives as Christ loved the church is too difficult and not at all worth the effort, if fathers can be lured away from teaching their children the faith, from praying with them daily, and bringing them to church each Sunday—excellent. They’ve already fallen. They just don’t know it yet.

Dear ones, our enemies are ferocious, and disobeying our orders, deserting our post will only lead to disaster.

And this is all the more reason, then, for us to rally to Christ, our divine Champion and Commander—the One Who has conquered in the great contest, Who has dealt the devil a mortal head wound with his own weapon, the cross, and Who triumphs and forgives us and brings life out of death.

The incarnate Son of God routs our enemies with a single Word; He plunders and pillages the devil's kingdom without fear; and our Lord has made you participants in His victory over the forces of darkness by Your baptism into Him.

Like the ancient Roman soldiers, you've been marked with the insignia of your general, branded, as it were, with the sign of the holy cross to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. And like the soldiers of old, you are called to take up your armor and weapon and to battle the hordes of darkness.

Let the belt of truth free you to maneuver well and boldly engage in the fight. Let the righteousness of Christ, which you have by faith, be your vital protection as a breastplate, which will never fail, and may the gospel of peace always keep you ready to meet what lies ahead with fortitude and valor.

Let no one cast aside the shield of faith lest you be pierced through and brought down by the flaming darts of wicked lusts, nor let the helmet of salvation be thrown off lest your mind be exposed and overwhelmed by evil.

And having taken up the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit, stand firm together, then, and cut down the demons without fear.

Brothers and sisters, you've been given what you need in your Baptism to withstand in the evil day; here soon enough you'll be fed once more with the holy Supper for you regain your strength and return to battle once more.

And you should know there will come a day when the warfare of the Church on earth will be at an end—when, by God's grace, the Church militant and the Church triumphant, all the saints who've gone before us and are now in heaven, one day soon, the whole Church will repose in glory together as one, with none to make us afraid.

But so long as we await our Lord's return, that is not this day. For us here, now, as long as we're in the Church on earth, we struggle. This day, we fight, and we do so knowing with full confidence that, at the last, in Christ, we will win.

So, remain at your post; obey the orders given you and carry out your God-given duties. Wage war in the Spirit according to your station, praying at all times and standing firm to the very end as faithful soldiers of Christ.

And relish what great honor and prestige it is for us to fight the forces of darkness together as one under Him, our great Commander and the unconquered Light of the World.

In Him, we have the victory. And to Him is all glory unto ages of ages. Amen.