

*Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace; that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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St. John Chrysostom famously wrote, *You are a poor soldier of Christ if you think you can overcome without fighting and win the crown without conflict.* In this morning's Epistle St. Paul writes to the new Christian converts of Ephesus to be on their guard, *to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, and to put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* The Church appoints this Epistle for us this morning because she expects the same from us that *we may be able to stand in the evil day.* Even though we have lived most of our lives comfortably and free from persecution, the Christian life is a lifelong struggle, a lifelong battle. We pray this morning for pardon and peace, even though we have been fortunate to live most of our lives in peace with the world. But peace with the world can make the struggle of faith fierce. And it is precisely when we have been lulled into a false security, into believing that our sins are really not all that bad, that we really do not need to seek God's pardon, that we let down our armor and the fiery darts we hear of in this morning's Epistle find their mark in our souls.

We are told this morning that *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, that our fight is not with other people, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* Our battle is against the spiritual powers who makes enemies of Christ and of His Church. Our battle is against those spiritual powers who are just waiting for us to let our guard down. We heard last Sunday of the importance of wearing our wedding garments. For only those who wear their wedding garment, who wear their baptismal robe will be allowed to attend the wedding banquet of the Son of God. This requires seeking out God's pardon for our sins, sins which keep us from putting on our wedding robes. Today we are taught that along with the wedding garment we must wear our spiritual armor, and most importantly the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. This spiritual armor, *the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the boots of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit,* are not acquired on our own piece-meal, but is given to us by God through prayer. See that we are reliant upon God even for the armor He warns us to wear. With this armor we are expected to go into battle daily, into a wicked and fallen world, protected from what the enemy may wield against us and to stand courageously for the Kingdom of Heaven. St. Paul

writes that we are to wield this armor with faith and praying constantly against the work of evil, and for the uplifting of the Church and for each other, *watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.*

We are told this morning that among our spiritual arsenal the most important pieces of armor are the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation. The shield of faith defends us from a lifetime of fiery darts and blows from the enemy. The helmet of salvation protects us and is given only through faithfully seeking repentance and God's pardon. For there can be no defense against the enemy without the pardon and faith which leads to true peace. True peace as the Church teaches, comes only to those who do not just seek signs and wonders, but have a real faith in Jesus Christ, as this morning's Gospel teaches. The nobleman of Capernaum came to Jesus asking that He would *come down* and heal his son, for his son was nearly dead. But Jesus rebukes him and brings him to repentance by saying, *except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.* But the nobleman proves his faith in Jesus by begging again that Jesus come down and heal his son. And Jesus said to the nobleman, *go thy way, thy son liveth.* And from that very hour the nobleman's son was healed.

The Gospel teaches us that true faith in Christ, as the nobleman learned to embrace, would be rewarded. Our prayers may not always be answered the way we think it best. The nobleman thought it best for Jesus to come into his home and stand by his son's bedside in order to heal him. But in granting the nobleman's prayer, by rewarding his faith, Jesus also proves that He did not need to be physically present. The very word, *thy son liveth*, was powerful enough to raise up the man's son, and the nobleman at hearing these words *believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him and went on his way rejoicing.* As the nobleman discovered, it was from that very hour in which Jesus said *thy son liveth* that his entire household took up the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation.

We are poor soldiers of Christ if we think we can overcome without fighting and win the crown without conflict. We are poor soldiers of Christ if we do not put on our spiritual armor, if we never take up the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, or the helmet of salvation. We will not know the peace of God without them. And we shall not know real peace until we have experienced God's pardon and forgiveness. So let us put on the whole armor of God, *the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the boots of the gospel of peace...and the above all the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation... and the sword of the spirit...that we*

*may be able to stand in the evil day, watching with all perseverance and supplication for the saints. Amen.*