

Sermon #1,266: Ephesians 6:10-19

5-21-17, Easter 6, "Rogate" / Catechumen Exam, Bethany-Princeton MN

THE ARMOR OF GOD INCLUDES PRAYING

Prayer: Lord, teach us to pray by showing us that we are placed on a battlefield where Satan takes up arms against us. How can we stand? By calling upon You, our Captain in the fight. Help us to use the armor of God, especially the shield of faith and the sword of the Word of God, by praying to You trusting in the promises of Your Word. Help us to pray unceasingly and with confidence from our Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Text, Ephesians 6:10-19. ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - ¹⁹ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, especially our catechumens Ben and Carrie, who by baptism have been clothed with Christ and have put on the armor of God: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen!

"Put on the whole armor of God." The reason the Bible pictures Christians wearing armor is not to teach that Christians are to be warlike. No, it's because they have an enemy against whom we're totally powerless.

He writes: **“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”**

Our enemy is Satan, and with him all the demonic powers. This is why each Christian needs the armor of God. Here in Ephesians 6, the armor of God is broken down into these parts: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. In another place (Romans 13), St. Paul says simply: **“Put on the armor of light ... Put on our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The individual elements that we hear about today, then, are simply the elements of putting on Christ. The important thing to know is that this is protective armor against Satan and the demons.

How do you have this armor? It is given to you. As we learned this year in catechism class, it was given to you in Baptism. The Bible says being baptized is being **“clothed with Christ” (Ga 3:27)**. In Baptism He puts onto you the pure, clean, whiter-than-new-snow righteousness of Christ.

This is God’s armor. God knows that as soon as He makes you His child you are also given a very strong enemy: Satan. As long as you’re in the world you are in danger from him. So in Baptism, God provides you with protective battle gear. It is the armor of light. It is your defense. When you are tempted, to receive strength against sinning you can say: **“But I am baptized!”** Also when you have sinned and your guilty conscience is accusing you, you can say: **“But I am baptized!”** God’s child! You are under His protection. Your Baptism defends you.

How does it do this? Just automatically? St. Paul gives the answer here. When he gets to the end of the individual pieces of armor, and appears to finish by saying to take **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,”** he is not finished. He says: **“praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – and for me ...”** He says to pray.

Praying, then, is how your Baptism defends you. It is how you use the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of God’s Word. The baptismal life is the life of prayer. As a baptized Christian living in this world, Satan and his demonic powers are after you. So you pray!

The problem is that we don't see this danger as we should. We don't see that we are on a battlefield where the powers of darkness and the cosmic hosts of wickedness led by Satan are always attacking us. We are not driven to prayer as a result. We don't get the urgency of it.

But all you have to do is look around you at the state of the world, all the things going wrong, all the evil in the world, the sad state of marriage today, the advancement of deviant sexuality that is bent on destroying marriage as we know it, the number of Christians being singled out for attack in the Middle East, the low numbers of people regularly hearing God's Word in church on Sundays, and I could go on. Why is this happening? Satan is driving this, to destroy family, church and state.

All you have to do is look at your own life, your struggles to believe, and how quickly you are overtaken by anger, jealousy, selfishness, greed, lust, worry, despondency, sadness, fear, how easy it is to argue and try to get your own way and not be sorry or not forgive, to toss off a harsh word or a word of criticism and judgment, dismiss someone's feelings. Isn't the reason that it is so easy to do what you shouldn't, that the devil wants you to do these sins? And isn't the reason that it's so hard to do what God wants you to do that the devil doesn't want you to do them?

We don't see the devil's presence as we should, so we don't pray as we should. If we see that things are wrong in the world, or in our life, we see it only in the human arena. We look for someone to blame for what's wrong. We look for human solutions. We work harder to fix it. We worry it to death. That way is doomed! As the hymn "A Mighty Fortress" says: "*Stood we alone in our own might, our striving would be losing*" (ELH 251:2).

But as baptized children of God we have an advantage: "*For us the one true Man doth fight, the Man of God's own choosing. Ask ye, who is this? Jesus Christ it is!*" We don't have to defend ourselves when we come under attack. Someone defends us: Jesus Christ. We need to do nothing but pray. In praying we call on Christ to fight for us. He defeated the devil before. Now when we call on Him He defeats the devil again for us right where we are, undoing what the devil has done in our life, chasing him away.

This praying is intimately connected to our baptism. In baptism you received the name of Jesus. His name was put on you. You were baptized

in His name, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You are running around in life as a little “in-His-name.” Now Jesus instructs us to pray to “*the Father in My name.*” Praying in the name of Jesus is praying as God’s baptized child. This is using your baptism!

So the baptized life is the life of prayer. In confirmation, we return to the promises of baptism. So it’s a good time to be reminded today, Ben and Carrie, that you are entering a life of prayer with all of us. You are part of a praying community that uses the armor of God by praying.

Based on what St. Paul says in Ephesians 6:18-19, I want to highlight a few practical things about this life of prayer:

1. Your prayer life begins in church.

St. Paul says: “**Praying ... in the Spirit.**” The way you do this is by continuously receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. At church we ask the Holy Spirit to come to us again, as He did in Baptism. We begin every service with the words of our Baptism. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, so the Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God is giving us faith through His Word. This faith produces the ability to pray.

The liturgy gives us words to pray together. We join our voices together to pray. We don’t pray alone. We pray: “Our Father ...” You hear others praying with you and for you. When you miss church, you miss praying with others and others miss you praying with them. Together we raise our voices in prayer against the devil. Isn’t this protective armor?

Coming regularly to church also means your prayers are regular, and they are informed by God’s Word. When prayer is done only in crisis mode, people don’t know what to pray or how. Regularly praying together as the family of God helps to make it easy and natural.

2. Praying is just asking; don’t be afraid to ask.

St. Paul says: “**Praying with all prayer and supplication.**” A supplication is a petition. It is just a request. A simple word for this is: asking. Sometimes maybe you don’t know what to ask. Well, the first thing to ask for is God’s forgiveness! You know the answer. He forgives you in Christ. Then you know your heavenly Father will hear your prayers.

The easiest way to tell you what to ask God is to look at what you are worried about. When you answer, "What am I worried about?" there you have a prayer. Asking God is a "Please help!" prayer. The next thing you can do is to ask, "Who do I know who needs help?" Ask for them. Finally, think of what is on your plate this week; what do you need to get done, or what might be hard. Then ask God for help with that.

3. Find a time for prayer at the beginning or end of the day.

St. Paul says: "**Being watchful to this end with all perseverance.**" Another way of saying this is: "Staying awake for this at all times" (*Kleinig, Grace Upon Grace, p. 257, 263*). It's impossible to spend every moment in prayer. The apostle Paul's own times of prayer were in the morning before work and in the evening before bed. Nighttime is one of those times when it's really important to pray. At night everything seems darker and more foreboding. The worries increase at night. You might even wake up in the middle of the night with a worry. Perhaps God woke you up so you can read the Bible, perhaps a Psalm, and pray. Someone needs your prayers around the clock, and you can do this for them out of love.

4. Finally, pray for the whole church and its ministers.

St. Paul says to make "**supplication for all the saints - and for me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the gospel.**"

We do this in the prayer of the church on Sundays. But Satan is attacking the church, the pastors and the people, every day. He tries to discourage pastors so that they will lose their zeal. He tries to drive a wedge between congregation members. The best thing we can do is pray for each other, for the church and for the pastors. These prayers are intercessions: asking help for others. It's greater than that, really. It is using the sword of God's Word in prayer to drive Satan away from our fellow Christians, and from the Church, so that we can listen in peace to our Lord and speak to Him in prayer, praise, and adoration. Amen!