

Grace and peace to you . . .

You have come here this morning to hear the powerful Word of God, and receive His comforting Gospel promises. You have come to worship your Lord and Savior, looking to Him for the forgiveness of sins. You have come to find some rest for your weary soul. But why is your soul weary? Is it because you didn't get enough sleep last night? Is it because you have a tough week ahead of you at work? No, these things make your body weary, but not your soul. Your soul is weary because you are constantly engaged in a fierce and raging battle. There is a war going on around you every moment of your life, a war that wearies your soul.

There are some who teach that the battle of Armageddon will be fought with tanks and guns. This is not so! Those who teach such things are liars. The battle of Armageddon is the final battle in a very long and grueling war. That war is raging right now. It is not fought with tanks, nor with rifles, not with missiles, nor with fighter jets. The epistle lesson this morning lists the divine armor which you have been given to fight this war, and identifies those enemies against whom you fight.

You do not fight against flesh and blood [12]. While this should be obvious to you, it was not so obvious in Paul's day, when Christians were being imprisoned and even killed by the government authorities. Yet Paul instructs the Christians in Ephesus that their battles are not physical. Despite the fact that they were receiving physical punishments in their bodies, the war that was being waged was in the spiritual realm. The same holds true for you. You are fighting principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness [12], the very same enemies which troubled the Christians in Ephesus.

How do Satan and his minions of darkness trouble your spirit? I will illustrate three powerful weapons at Satan's disposal: One of the tools the devil favors in this day and age is called "secular humanism." This is the weapon students confront everyday in the classroom. The nation's schools and universities have become the home territory of Satan's armies, where his dangerous lies are taught as if they were beacons of truth. Students are expected to learn and grow, to develop into mature adults, by absorbing this idea of the devil. The main doctrine of this falsehood is that you have the ability to rise above your own shortcomings, that by increasing in knowledge, your world will become a better place. This is the same lie that Satan fed to Eve: knowledge will make you better.

Secular humanism teaches that human behavior is the product of heredity and environment, not of your sinful nature nor of the Holy Spirit. It gives you an excuse for wickedness. It teaches that the universe evolved according to scientific laws, not that God created it in six days by the power of His mighty Word.

It teaches that man is nothing more than a highly evolved monkey. Secular humanism would also have you believe that all forms of religious expression are equally valid. If you believe this, then Satan has defeated you.

Another tool which Satan has at his disposal is your own doubt. He will not hesitate to play on your doubts, to plague your mind with uncertainty about your salvation. The nobleman from Capernaum, when his son was sick unto death, may have doubted God's love and craved a miraculous sign. Only Jesus' Word and promise overcame the man's doubt. When things go wrong in your daily life, or tragedies occur, do you begin to doubt God's merciful goodness to you? Then you have been struck by demonic weaponry. Do you sometimes doubt whether certain sins of yours have been forgiven? Then you have suffered a direct hit from Satan's missiles. These are the fiery darts of the wicked one [16]. If you deny the truth and reality of Christ's atoning death on the cross, then Satan has defeated you. Only the powerful Word and promise of Jesus can overcome the devil's deadly tool of doubt.

The most dangerous tool of the devil is false doctrine. One false teacher can lead thousands of souls into hell. This weapon is so effective because, in your soft and sinful flesh, you are inclined to believe Satan's lies. You want to believe that you contribute to our salvation. You want to believe that something about you compelled God to save you. You want to believe that you chose to love God by your own reason and strength. These are the deadly lies which Satan uses to pollute and corrupt the congregations of the church. Once you believe these lies, then Satan has conquered you.

Left to yourself, you will be defeated and utterly destroyed by these forces of darkness. However, today I bring you good news. The good news is this: God has provided you with both the defensive and the offensive weaponry to counter all the attacks of Satan, and even to plunder his camp and win victories there. St. Paul lists this divine weaponry in today's Epistle:

1. The belt of Truth: Satan gives you lies; God gives you Truth. This is the Truth of Jesus Christ, who is the Truth. Truth is: Christ has saved you from your sins. Truth is: Jesus has defeated death and destroyed the power of the grave. Truth is: Christ has already beaten the devil. Sin, death, and the devil were defeated when Jesus laid down His life for you. This Truth is revealed to you in His powerful Word, the same Word which healed that nobleman's son. As you believe this Word and Truth of God, Christ protects you from the wily lies of Satan. As you cling to the full knowledge of this Truth, taught to you in the Scriptures, the Holy Ghost defends you from the lures of false doctrine.

2. The breastplate of Righteousness: This breastplate is a hardened armor which protects your frail flesh,

so prone to doubt. This could not be your own righteousness, for that would protect you from nothing. This breastplate is the righteousness of Christ, an impenetrable armor that nothing can pierce, placed upon you in holy Baptism. With His righteousness around you, your soft flesh is safe from all the attacks of Satan. Trust in Christ's righteousness to protect you, and you will never be disappointed.

3. The shoes of Peace: This peace comes only because you have peace with God through the blood of Jesus. Because Jesus died in your place, and took on Himself all the wrath of God, you now have peace with God. Knowing this, you are at peace. Now this peace carries you along, like comfortable shoes upon your feet, to go into the highways and byways, sharing this message of peace with everyone around you. These shoes of peace protect your feet from stumbling, from growing weary, and from stepping into the deadly snares of Satan as you, prepared by this Gospel, march into enemy territory, trampling your enemies by the power of God.

4. The shield of Faith: Faith is your shield which deflects all the fiery darts of the wicked one. What lie of Satan can harm you while you carry your faith like a shield? Not one. You did not create this shield; it is a free gift given to you by the Holy Ghost at your Baptism. This shield of faith is created and strengthened through the Word and the Sacraments. Bear this shield boldly, and the demonic forces will wither before you.

5. The helmet of Salvation: This salvation is a solid fact. It took place nearly 2,000 years ago on a hill called "The Skull" outside Jerusalem. Salvation is said and done; nothing can change this objective fact. With this knowledge on your head like a helmet, your brain is protected from the injury of doubt. Salvation has already been accomplished. This salvation has been given to you. This, too, is a fact, sealed by the reality of your Baptism. The water, with the power of God's word, was poured on your head and this helmet of salvation became your own. All doubts crumble as you remember that you are baptized, and recall the promises of salvation that God gave you at the font.

Finally, you have been given a mighty weapon. It is a finely fashioned, two-edged sword, so sharp that it can divide soul and spirit [Heb 4:12]. This sword is the very Word of God, crafted by the Holy Ghost, forged through the pens of the apostles and prophets. This same, powerful Word healed the nobleman's son in Capernaum. This sword is sharper than any man-made weapon. The two edges are the Law and the Gospel. The edge of the Law cuts a man in two, and the edge of the Gospel makes him whole again. Notice that this sword is the only offensive weapon in the inventory of divine armor. With this sword, you can go on the offensive against the kingdom of Satan. This is done when you witness to those around you. As you wield this blazing sword, the Spirit of God cuts into the devil's realm, and rescues those whom Satan has enslaved with his darkness. The sword of God's Word can cut through any armor,

and can pulverize the hardest of hearts.

You need not be a master swordsman to be an effective soldier. This sword is so subtly made that a little child can use it. For the sword itself does all the work. It has all the power. It has all the skill. Your effectiveness as a soldier of the cross does not depend on your strength, your abilities, or anything of yours. Your effectiveness with God's Word is produced in you by the Holy Ghost. Therefore, you can consider it a privilege to take up this sword and use it daily. Go ahead, pick it up. Swing it around. You'll be surprised how easily it slices through the enemies around you. You'll love the way it cuts a man and heals him in a single stroke. And you'll never grow tired of its flashing blade as you daily invade the devil's kingdom, armed with the power of God.

The war rages on. The battle is fierce indeed. You do not fight against flesh and blood, but against the minions of Satan, the forces of darkness. The more formidable a soldier you are—that is, the more you rely on the divine armor which God has given you—the bigger and badder the opponents Satan will send against you. Yet, the household of the Church is kept by God's protection through all adversity; Mount Zion cannot be removed, but abideth forever. And so, fully equipped by your merciful Lord of Sabaoth with His heavenly arsenal, you will share in the final victory. Jesus Christ, the ultimate Warrior, Victor of victors, will give you the crown of victory, and a celebration feast to boot! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .