

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Lent III  
 March 3, 2024  
 rmceely+

. . .stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty  
 to be our defense  
 against all our enemies. . .

Words from this week's Collect;

That short prayer just before the Epistle each week.  
 Today's Collect, and several others during the year  
 Seek God's defense from our "Enemies."  
 It is that ecclesiastical term "enemies"  
 that is the topic of today.  
 I ask the question: "who are our enemies?"

My parents could easily answer the question:

They were the forces of evil  
 that attacked the innocent in the Second World War.  
 In the days of the Cold War  
 We would answer; the Soviet Union, Russia.

In our time we might answer

The Muslim terrorists who have vowed to kill us.

Ukrainians and Israelis would have a different answer.

What about a devout Christian of today?

What would be the answer?

In our Baptism Service

After the baby has been baptized with water  
 And before returning the baby to the Parents  
 Making the sign of the cross on the baby's forehead,  
 The priest anoints the baby with this prayer:

“We receive this child into the congregation of Christ’s flock  
 And do sign him with the sign of the cross, in token  
     That hereafter, he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith  
         Of Christ crucified  
 And manfully fight under His banner against,  
     Sin  
     The world  
     And the devil  
 And to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant  
     Unto his life’s end.”

The lyric of one of our cherished hymns says:  
 “Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war  
 with the Cross of Jesus, going on before”.

In Revelation we learn of Archangel Michael’s war with the devil  
 which resulted in a heavenly victory,  
 but earthly exile over the devil.

To a Christian, the concept of “Enemy” is perhaps more abstract,  
 Maybe a higher plane of thought.  
 Less focused upon other humans  
 And more on the forces that sometimes drive them.

To a Christian of Orthodox doctrine  
 The “Enemy” is not human.  
 But the ruler of darkness  
     The devil and his works.

These and other manifestations have led to the oft misunderstood  
 doctrine of the “Church Militant”.  
 A defensive battle against the devil  
 And his worldly works.

However, some have kidnapped the doctrine of the Church  
 Militant for political purposes.

I step over them this morning and speak of the orthodox doctrine  
 Which is far more difficult to achieve.  
 A militancy against the devil  
 His minions, and his evil intentions.

St Paul described the Enemy to the Ephesians this way:  
 “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood  
 but against principalities  
 against powers  
 against the rulers of the darkness of this world  
 against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

The battlefield that I want to discuss this morning is not the one  
 against the flesh and blood of other people  
 But the one that lies within ourselves.

And that is the battlefield of the Church Militant.  
 Within ourselves  
 Our minds and hearts.  
 The battle is engaged often, almost every day.  
 And the prize is nothing less than our immortal souls.

In the course of your Lenten discipline  
 You may not have realized it, but you have come across the  
 Enemy  
 His works in your life  
 And perhaps in the lives of others.

We live in a fallen and broken world.  
 A world ruled by the rulers of darkness, to use St Paul’s  
 Terminology.  
 Paul’s world was soaked in licentiousness.  
 Is ours?  
 Are we under attack?  
 How does he go about it?

The moral decay of our society is a profit center in the  
entertainment industry

Sex sells and even actors and vocalists  
of some talent  
succumb to the Scanty costumes  
and suggestively lewd behavior  
to sell themselves to our children.  
Yet we reward and applaud them.

Films are written, directed and edited to achieve ratings marking  
them

As portraying sexual nudity and behaviour.

Sexual intimacy among our young has become debased  
To the equivalency of a handshake.

A degree of violence

portrayed in excruciating detail  
Seems necessary for commercial funding.

Our children are crippled in their speech by foul language  
Held hostage by the potty mouths of the Hollywood  
examples they emulate.

Advertisers learned long ago that they could steal our attention  
With photographs and 30 second commercials featuring  
Lascivious content.

Were St Paul transported here

He might well think he was in first century Corinth  
Except things are far worse.

So if we know the Enemy

And we know the battlefield  
And we know the tactics of the attack;  
How are we to go about defending ourselves?

First, we must recognize and identify the Enemy at work.

In some instances the enemy is the evil one himself.

In others it is the evil he has infected in others.

But occasionally, the enemy is ourselves.

The work we are doing during this Lenten Season

Is the most effective way to defeat the evil that lurks within.

The first step is to shine the light of truth on our lives.

As Paul advised in today's Epistle:

“All things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light:  
for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.”

Or in more modern language:

“everything that is exposed by the light becomes visible  
for everything that becomes visible is light.”

So exposing the sin is the beginning of the battle.

We expose sins in the light of conscience

In the focus of truth

And the harsh conviction of our sins.

In the spirit of the Church Militant

We seek absolution

And blot them from existence.

We defeat the devil one more time.

However, our Foe is persistent

And knows our weaknesses

He will be back with another approach

Another temptation.

But we are ready for him

Ready, if we have resolved to amend our lives

And are no longer in his sights.

His whiles and deceit

His forces of evil

Gain no traction

And we repel them.

And once more he is defeated  
Deprived of another Christian soul  
And the Enemy is vanquished.