

St Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Trinity XXI  
 October 20, 2024  
 rmceely+

*And having done all, to stand. Stand therefor*

Saint Paul's famous "Armour of God" Epistle dominates the  
 propers this Sunday.

Paul most likely wrote it while he was imprisoned in Rome  
 or as he describes it  
 as "an ambassador in bonds".

Was it the physical bonds of his jailer,  
 or perhaps the bonds of the love of God,  
 compelling him to do God's will?

He was in the presence of Roman soldiers almost 24/7 and their  
 battle armour must been a constant presence.

Can you picture 62 year old Paul

In the dark

Dank

Stale air of the prison

Using everything at his disposal to spread the word of God

Writing this letter to the Church he founded at Ephesus,

13 years before,

Using even the armour of his captors as a metaphor  
 that has been so useful to so many.

Paul begins with the loins gird with truth.

Around the soldiers waist was a wide and thick leather belt.

the foundation of the armour.

The breastplate was hooked to the top of the belt  
 to keep the plate in place.

From the bottom of the belt hung thick leather pieces  
 that were a sort of skirt.

The leather was backed with metal plates  
 that were riveted in place.  
 The skirt was good protection for the soldier's legs.  
 From the belt also hung his sword  
 and small spears or lances.

Paul begins here,  
 at the foundation of the armour  
 and Paul assigns to it the concept of truth  
 "having your loins gird about with truth".  
 The Whole Armour of God is built upon the foundation of truth.

Truth

is the story of Jesus, the Christ  
 His life, death, resurrection and ascension  
 The power of God in our lives

Paul's armour of God is based upon this solid foundation: the truth  
 Just as our lives with God are founded in and based upon truth.

The solid truth is invincible.  
 The devil's lies cannot erode the truth.  
 This foundation of truth supports all the rest.

Breastplate of righteousness:

The Roman soldier wore a breastplate that covered his heart and vital organs. It was often molded to the form of his torso by metal smiths.

The outermost surface was often polished and shown like a mirror on the day of battle. The sun's glare from a phalanx of the Legion must have been a terrifying sight. Beneath the outer metal plate were layers of thick leather.

Righteousness, the breastplate of righteousness, he called it.

Righteousness is adherence to God's laws,  
 the constant desire to obey Our Lord  
 and to avoid sin.

God wrote the Christian laws in our hearts,  
 not on stone tablets.

The breastplate of righteousness protected the heart of the soldier  
Just as righteousness protects our hearts,  
where God's laws are written.

Feet shod with the Gospel of peace  
The soldier marched long distances. His feet were very important.  
So he was equipped with shoes equal to the task.

The sole of the sandal  
was thick leather  
and on the bottom  
there were cleats of hard leather  
or nails to maintain firm footing  
to prevent him from slipping in battle.

The Roman formation was essential to their tactics and one man  
falling would expose the formation to attack.

The tops of the sandals were strips of leather  
backed by metal plates  
riveted in place to protect from sword or lance.

The sandals were laced to the soldier's calf with long leather laces  
that he wound up to his knee.

On the front of his leg, he wore metal shin guards.

Paul interestingly assigns to the soldier's sandals, the "preparation  
of the Gospel of Peace".

Paul is a man who knew something about walking great distances.

He walked the Middle East, more than once

Palestine,  
Syria,  
Turkey,  
Macedonia,  
Greece,  
and Italy.

He walked half the known world of the Mediterranean of his day  
to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
the Gospel of Peace.

We too walk the Gospel of Jesus Christ.  
We walk a narrow and long pathway to God  
    all our lives.  
The road is hard,  
    sometimes it is steep,  
    treacherous.  
It is fraught with obstacles  
    and is occasionally dangerous.  
The footing is not always certain.  
We slip  
We fall  
But shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace  
    We always rise and take that next step to God.

Shield of faith  
The Roman soldiers battle shield was large and rectangular shaped.  
It was covered with a metal outer shell  
    but the inner layers were animal skins.  
They were relatively light  
    but effective to ward off strikes from sword and spear.  
Shields were soaked in water before the battle  
    and the animal skins absorbed water  
    so that the flaming arrows of the enemy  
    could be extinguished by the shield and the flames burn out  
    with out harm.

St Paul notes that with the armour of God,  
    above all take the shield of faith  
    to be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.  
Our faith is our shield  
    And like that soldier of 2000 years ago  
    in today's assault of secularism  
    We are never without it.

### Helmet of salvation

The soldier was topped with a metal helmet  
that protected his head  
but still allowed him to see well, hear and speak.

Paul chose to associate the helmet with salvation.

Our knowledge,  
our function  
and our intellect and cognition  
are protected by the knowledge of our salvation.

### Sword of the spirit

The Roman sword was a big advance in metal technology.

It was a hard metal alloy that held a sharp edge.  
It was double sided with two razor sharp and rigid cutting surfaces  
that gave the soldier slashing ability  
from both sides of the sword.

It was sharply pointed like a knife as well,  
giving the soldier stabbing capability.

It was short,  
well-balanced  
and relatively light weight  
and so it was quick.

A feared and effective weapon in close combat.

It was both an offensive and defensive weapon.

Paul gave it the attribute of the Spirit  
or the word of God.

The Greek word for Spirit is from the word for breath  
or wind  
and is associated with the spoken word.

John's Gospel refers to Jesus as the Word of God.

He says:

In the beginning was the Word.

Like that Roman sword,  
 The Word of God  
 is both a defense and an offense for us.

Like most people of his day, Paul knew the Bible.  
 There is a passage in Isaiah  
 from some 700 or 800 years before Paul,  
 that may have guided him in this Epistle.

In one of his Salvation Oracles Isaiah described a world  
 A world in which sinfulness had triumphed  
 And the children of Israel  
 had so separated themselves from God  
 that they were utterly unable to climb from the muck  
 of their sins  
 that only God could save them  
 and God would have his justice.

Isaiah said God would put on His armour and come after the  
 transgressors. Of God, Isaiah said:

“For he put on righteousness  
 as a breastplate  
 and an helmet of salvation  
 upon his head  
 and he put on the garments of  
 vengeance for clothing  
 and was clad with zeal as a cloak.”

Is 59:17

So we now know the Whole Armour of God.  
 What difference does it make, what of the whole armour of God  
 today?

We live in a time of danger  
 and of evil.

In St Paul's day

Christians faced a mortal threat  
that cost many their very lives.

Today we face a moral threat,

A fight not in the sense of a military battle

But it is every bit as dangerous

It is important to recognize that

we too (in Paul's words of today's Epistle)

“wrestle not against the flesh and blood

not against men and women, as such,

but “against principalities,

against powers,

against the rulers of the darkness,

and against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Spiritual wickedness takes many forms in our lives in San  
Francisco in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

People abuse each other in assaults of words, gestures

Crimes of terror and wanton violence

On the roadways, on sidewalks, bike paths, athletic  
events, concerts

Wherever people are gathered,

There are always a few who abuse

People neglect each other, ignore each other

Occasionally even families are infected and prey upon each other.

While we face human agents,

It is the force of evil

With which we do battle.

Wickedness takes many forms

But it is all from the same source

Evil is a fact in our lives

In those times  
Keeping God in clear focus  
Can be tough.  
There will be doubt  
And we wrestle with our belief  
And sometimes we fight just to maintain.

When you find yourself in the fight,  
or when you need to be sustained;  
put on the Whole Armour of God,  
and know that you may withstand the wiles of the devil,  
the vicissitudes of life  
with the helmet of salvation,  
the breastplate of righteousness,  
the gird of truth,  
the shield of faith,  
the sword of the Word  
and the preparation of the Gospel.

As Paul tells us,  
there are occasions  
when we are called upon  
to stand  
and to defend;  
or to stand and to spread the word of God.  
when it is so very difficult to do so in our society of  
self “enlightened” lost souls.

The Whole Armour of God  
is not a costume to be put on and taken off  
It is inside us.  
It lives with us always.  
When the going gets tough  
Put it on.  
I know people who put it on every morning to get through the day.



As St Paul,  
a man who withstood it all unto his death told us:  
With it  
we may be able to withstand the evil of the day:

and having done all,  
to stand.  
Stand therefore.