

It is proper and right for all on earth to give glory to You, O Father of mercy, because You sent Your Son to war against, and to overcome, our enemies. Endow us with strength and fortitude never to despair in the strife with the powers of darkness, but at all times grant us victory and perseverance through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 70, p. 164)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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 firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

In Christ Jesus, who is our strength, dear fellow redeemed:

After Germany surrendered in WWII there was in place a Nazi resistance force. It was called *Werwolf*. It was primarily a propaganda tool, but the American GIs were warned by Armed Forces Radio: *"Every friendly German civilian is a disguised soldier of hate. Armed with the inner conviction that the Germans are still superior ... that one day it will be their destiny to destroy you. Their hatred and their anger ... are deeply buried in their blood. A smile is their weapon by which to disarm you ... In heart, body and spirit every German is Hitler."*

Even though the War with Germany was over there were pockets of resistance. While not very successful, the American GIs were still to be fitted with their armor to protect themselves from the occasional sniper and bomber. Spiritually we Christians are engaged in skirmishes with the resistance force of the powers of darkness: the devil, the unbelieving world and our own sinful flesh. You see: **Though Satan's Kingdom Has Fallen, We Still Need to Be Armed.**

I

You became a heavenly warrior already at your baptisms, dressed in the impenetrable robe of Christ's righteousness. Now those of you who were baptized when you were babies, you might think it strange you were a heavenly warrior in such a weak and

vulnerable state. But frankly even if you were baptized as an adult, you were in that same state. Your present status remains weak and vulnerable in your own strength. Paul begins our text by saying: “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.”

From small on you have been singing these words in which you confess the same: *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong; they are weak but He is strong.* All our armor, even our one weapon, as heavenly warriors are forged by the person and work of Jesus Christ our Savior, the Victor over hell’s Kingdom.

Satan’s weapon is death. So what happened to defeat our deserved death? God, in the second person, took on human flesh, body and soul, remained pure, undefiled from sin and then stepped into death with His eternally righteous body and soul and by rising overcame the power of death over us. Satan has no claim on you who have been washed clean in the blood of Christ through your holy baptism and dressed in the white Robe of His righteousness.

Satan desires you go AWOL from the army of heaven, but in Christ you are safe. Jesus promises no one can snatch you from His hand. But keep in mind you are safe in Christ, not in your power and might. It is when we forsake Christ to pursue our own self prescribed paths of righteousness that Satan and His kingdom can deceive us. Also do not believe the lie promoted by some false teachers that once saved – always saved. Scripture is filled with warnings about losing faith. Why would the Lord’s Apostle be inspired by the Spirit to write: “keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”, if we and our brothers and sisters in Christ could not fall. We are called to stand firm in the evil day, not in our own strength but in the strength of Christ Jesus in whom we have forgiveness of sins and His everlasting righteousness to claim as our own.

II

A big ploy of Satan’s kingdom is to have us dismiss its reality and instead “wrestle against flesh and blood”. We humans do this physically whether it be nation vs. nation; employee vs. employer; neighbor vs. neighbor; spouse vs. spouse; sibling vs. sibling. We even are deceived to think that we can oppose one another to find favor with God, as though we compete with each other to be judged more righteous than our fellow citizens, even fellow believers.

Our Lord Jesus knows our every need of body and soul. In our Gospel lesson we heard how compassionate our Lord was toward the crowd who had gathered around to hear the Word for three days but who had nothing to eat as they made their way back home and would possibly faint along the way. So He blessed seven loaves of

bread and a few small fish and fed the crowd of four thousand so that they were completely full.

But even more importantly He graciously and generously provides us what we need to stand spiritually, so that we do not faint along the way. The armor is all supplied by our Lord: “the belt of truth which equips us to be nimble and quick as we deal with many, varied and sly temptations – a belt braided together with the words and promises of God; the breastplate of righteousness which prevents all the accusations against us from mortally wounding us; shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of peace, a peace which only God can give us having secured our salvation by the blood of His Son; the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, trusting in Christ alone so that the sharp stings of sin cannot condemn us; the helmet of salvation, protecting us from the crashing blows of guilty consciences; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God the power of God unto salvation.

Our Lord does not leave persistence in the faith to our ingenuity. If He had, we would all have already failed miserably, but in His gracious working through the Spirit we remain steadfast boldly confessing to all our sins and confidently confessing Christ to be our one and only Savior. The armor first given us in our baptisms is still effective serving to protect us from all the sniping and explosions of our enemies, which seek to drive us away from Christ.

Do not sell your baptism short, it is still as effective today as it was the day you were first washed and equipped for the battles that you will face until the end. The war between heaven and hell for the human race is over and Christ remains victorious. We celebrate this accomplishment every Sunday, but live in the victory every day, no matter what we still must face. Since Christ has called His Church to be His instrument through which He calls, gathers and sanctifies all future saints, we are not immediately called out of this world plagued by Satan’s resistance force. We, the Church, baptize, proclaim the Gospel, forgive sins, set the table for the feast of the Lord’s true body and blood. Through these means Christ sends the Spirit bestowing upon us forgiveness, life and salvation.

Satan would love you to conclude that you no longer need be on your guard, lay aside your armor and stand before him and his allies completely defenseless. By losing faith in Christ alone as your Savior you would not benefit from the victory won for all sinners by Him. The War is over. The spiritual enemies of the human race have been defeated, but the demonic resistance goes on. Do not discard

your armor. Trust in the Lord and in the strength of His might and take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Amen.