

SPIRITUAL COMBAT IN ST. PAUL

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 Saturday, August 22, 2009
 Spiritual Warfare Conference, St. Michael's Media
 Livonia, Michigan

“Man’s life on earth is a warfare,” one translation of Job 7:1.

“Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Tim 6:12).

The Scriptures, Old Testament and New, point us down the terrible and glorious road of spiritual warfare.

To begin, I wish to thank Michael Voris for the invitation to speak, and Dierdre in particular for her many efforts in her work with me to make today a success. May God bless you both, and your whole team, with abundant fruits of personal holiness and apostolic fruit.

Another introductory note, I will be using much from scripture as this talk proceeds, and some of you may wish to return to those passages – a practice which I encourage, for it is important to expose yourselves to the Word found in Scriptures, for it is God’s Word to you. Therefore, I’ll post today’s discourse on my own web site and also provide a copy to St. Michael’s media for anyone who may be interested.

Now, to our topic.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI has been providing Wednesday Audience discourses on the topic of, well, *people*. These people are usually saints. He has been doing so for a reason he himself explains:

The Church lives in people and those who want to know the Church better, to understand her mystery, must consider the people who have seen and lived her message, her mystery. In the Wednesday Catecheses I have therefore been speaking for some time of people from whom we can learn what the Church is.¹

The Pope began with the Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers, some Fathers of the Church, and other saints and notable persons, interrupting for the year of St. Paul to comment many of St. Paul’s doctrines.

A couple weeks after Easter this year (April 22), the Pope spoke of a lesser known author, Ambrose Autpert, originally from Provence, but later living as a monk and abbot in Italy, during the times of Pepin the Short and Charlemagne. One of Ambrose’s works is entitled, *Conflictus vitiorum atque virtutum* (“Combat between the Vices and the Virtues”). Twenty-four pairs of vices and virtues take turns trying to woo the soul each to his own side.

In this creative work, Ambrose Autpert significantly turns to St. Paul where he writes, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, “General Audience,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, n. 17, 29 April 2009, p. 15.

3:12). This persecution can come from the outside, but it can also be an interior reality of the spiritual life, such as the distress which is inflicted upon souls by the devil, the flesh and the world. St. Paul wrote of what he knew, and his knowledge of the *spiritual battle* was not the knowledge of data or of information, it was the knowledge of experience, of one who had grappled in close quarters with the greatest spiritual foes.

Introduction to the Argument

This afternoon, therefore, I wish to propose for your consideration a study of *Spiritual Combat in St. Paul*. I regret to inform you, of course, that had Mr. Voris invited any other speaker to expound on the same topic, they would do so more clearly, more concisely, and in a more stirring way than I. But if your patience can endure my poor words, I think you will find some fruit, less because of what I say, than because of the abundance of God's Word which I will be contemplating. I say "God's Word," because the writings of St. Paul are not just the word of man, but they are also and completely the Word of God.

Incidentally, siding with St. Thomas Aquinas, I will include the Letter to the Hebrews among the Epistles of St. Paul.² The attribution of Hebrews to Paul is widely rejected in our day, and even if others may know scriptural matters far better than I, the arguments I have heard defending this rejection are not convincing to me, they are not strict proofs and a long tradition exists in the Catholic Church to attribute Hebrews to Paul.

My study will proceed under four general headings. First, the purpose or goal of spiritual combat. Second, the description, or, shall we say physiognomy of spiritual combat. Third, the interior and exterior aspects of spiritual combat. And finally, the tools by which St. Paul teaches us to engage in spiritual combat.

All of these considerations will show us that Jesus Christ, the only Savior, is the Protagonist, the Divine Hero, of our spiritual battles, and our engagement in spiritual combat cannot be successful by any efforts of our own, but rather, they will be successful only to the degree that they are a humble collaboration with the action of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in our souls.

Spiritual Combat in St. Paul

1. The Goal of Spiritual Combat

In all things, one who is wise will begin with the end. The end is, in fact, the first in thought, even if the last in execution. So let us start with the chronological end of St. Paul's life, where he teaches us the end or goal of spiritual combat, where he writes:

I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

² Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, prologue, St. Augustine Press (South Bend, IN, 2006), pp. 6-7.

righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Here the Apostle refers to a crown which is to be won. Now, in many points, the doctrine and expressions of St. Paul and St. John the Apostle are remarkably similar. St. John writes in the second and third chapters of the book of the Apocalypse a series of reproaches and exhortations of Christ to seven Churches. The Lord invites each of them to convert, and promises great rewards. Each of the seven rewards is preceded with, “*nikonti...*” “to him who conquers,” “to the one who is victorious.” For God loves sinners, and I dare say God has hope: he hopes that you and I will be the victorious, and that He may adorn us with the crown of victory after this life.

This victory, St. Paul says, has come after a “fight,” a “race,” and the parallelism makes us understand that the living of our *faith* is this fight or race. Yet the other two theological virtues are part of this spiritual combat, for not only is *faith* expressed, but also *charity*, where he says, “not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” The verb is in the past tense, the Aorist, and it is the verb form of the great Christian word *agape*; for at the time of our awarding, love for God and neighbor will need to have already been attained. And there is *hope*, because St. Paul hopes for his reward on “the Day,” or “that Day” as Zephaniah (1:15) called it, “a day of wrath, that day,” the day of judgment, the Second Coming of the Lord, the Parousia.

One may discern another goal or objective of the spiritual battle. St. Paul says in Ephesians, in a passage I will return to at more depth later, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11).

This allows us to consider the goal of the spiritual battle in two ways; one, positive, in that there is something to obtain, namely, a crown; another, negative, in that there is something to avoid, that is, the wiles of the devil.

Both the positive objective and the negative one can be reached only partially in this life, but, as St. Paul waits for the Last Day, then we know that they can be definitively obtained only after a long, hard fight when our lives in this world come to an end.

All of this is as much as to say that we are striving to reach heaven and avoid hell. This should come as a surprise to no one; yet in our day and age many never think of heaven or hell, or judgment, or even death. Blinded by the endless entertainment the world now supplies, or by the worries for wealth and clothes and other such transient things, or by the laziness of life or the sins of the flesh or the arrogance of mind, so many souls seem to have no idea what the purpose of their lives is. I wonder whether, when the angels blow the trumpet at the End, and Christ comes on the clouds, many will look into their pockets and say, “Christ is coming? I wonder how much money I have to deal with this new change of things...”

And so it is, that heaven and hell stand as the ultimate possible outcomes of our spiritual combat. Now we must profile this combat, see its parts, and prepare wisely, so that we can be one of the “*nikontes*,” the victorious.

2. *The Description of Spiritual Combat*

This is why we now move to the second point, namely, the description or physiognomy of the spiritual combat. Here, St. Paul tells us the nature of the enemies against whom we fight, and he also explains the arena in which the battle is waged.

Who are the enemies against whom we are fighting? St. Paul tells us who the first one is:

We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).

Therefore, our first enemy are the invisible agents of hell. These include Satan, all the fallen angels whom we refer to as demons or devils, and even the damned human souls who burn in fire and remain forever in unrepentant mortal sin, but sometimes we refer even to these as demons because they are spiritual and without their bodies and in hell.

We must remember that such are *persons*, that is, they are intellectual in nature. Angels, of course, even the fallen ones, have intellects vastly more powerful than ours, even if not enlightened by grace; for this reason, it is foolish for anyone to converse or debate with a demon, because in such a debate, the human agent will always lose. Added to their intelligence is the fact that they are liars, and they lie about everything. There are some souls who relish learning from demons things about how it all works in hell, and what powers they can harness, and through this impure curiosity they are led into the occult, into the New Age movements, into sorcery and other such. Reject this type of curiosity; the demons are liars anyway, you can't learn the truth from them.

Another dimension to consider about this first set of enemies is that they are *invisible*. A Psalm says, "You ministers of His that do His will," to which St. Thomas in a place explains that "the entire corporeal creation is ministered by the angels."³ The world is subject to angels, but as ministers, and not as lords, for the right of lordship belongs to Jesus Christ alone. These pure spirits by their intellect and will have immense power over the created world, something akin to but different from the power our souls have over our bodies. Being invisible, they influence that which is visible, in ways mysterious to man. Demons no longer minister to his will, but by nature can affect material things, and tempt us even in the flesh by their influences.

In St. Thomas' commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Angelic Doctor says more which can shed light on this verse, wherein St. Paul spoke about principalities and powers. He writes:

It seems to me that four of the superior orders are never sent, namely, Seraphim,⁴ Cherubim, Thrones and Dominations, but the inferior orders are sent, which is evident from their names. For the Virtues are sent to work miraculous deeds; the

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Op. cit., ch. 2, lect. 2, 102 (on Heb 2:5-8).

⁴ A couple paragraphs later in this same section, St. Thomas will explain the expression in Isaiah, "One of the seraphim flew to me," as meaning "the inferior orders use names of those by whose power and authority they act... and since the inferior executes his office in virtue of the Seraphim, therefore he is called by the name Seraphim, not that he was a Seraphim by nature." The reference is to Isaiah 6:6.

Powers, to enclose the powers of air; the Principalities, to govern a community or kingdom, and thus for the others. Now they are called Dominations for they order all these inferior things.⁵

It has not been revealed to man how many angels fell; the passage of the book of the Apocalypse where it says “[the dragon’s] tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven” leads us to guess that less than the majority sinned when they were tested, before the visible world began. Nor is it revealed to us whether some from every one of the nine choirs fell, or how many from each. But it may be that some fell from various choirs, and this would explain how demons can act in the world in so many ways which are so diverse. Some tempt men, sometimes to pride, sometimes to greed, sometimes to the senses; others perpetrate evils upon entire groups, such as families, parishes, regions or nations; others perform curses and marvels to deceive men in countless ways.

St. Paul elsewhere refers to these enemies, like in First Corinthians where he states, “Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24), or in Colossians where he states “[Christ] disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in [the cross]” (Col 2:15). The fact that Christ is the victor is a point to which I will return at the end of today’s talk. The point here is the angelic nature of our spiritual adversaries.

This enemy is real. This enemy is serious. This enemy intends to kill, and plays for keeps. Our souls tremble, because with human tactics and means, we could never resist. This is why St. Paul says, “put on the full armor of God.” Not man’s armor, God’s armor. Not some of his armor, by which St. Paul foresees those, such as Protestants, who have some of the Church’s goods, but not all of them, and even then with many errors mixed in. No, the *full* armor of God, which is the fullness of Catholic life.

Now we move to the second enemy which St. Paul addresses: the enemy within. That is to say, we can be our own worst adversaries when it comes to being victorious in spiritual combat. Let us read what the Apostle writes:

I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members! Wretched man that I am! (Rom 7:23).

This enemy is within his own body, and he is referring to the concupiscence of his soul, his tendency to evil and sin. Do you doubt that man is at war with himself? But St. Paul here says, “a law *at war* with the law” of the spirit. This is a powerful enemy, for which he names it a “law.” For unregenerated man is a “captive” of this law, that is, enslaved by sin; it is a law which does not solicit free submission, but a law which obliges ruthless coercion, painful force. About this law, a great commentator named Callan writes,

The term “law” (nomos) occurs four times in these two verses. The more common opinion [of other commentators] considers the **law of God** and the **law of the mind** as one; and, likewise, **another law** and **the law of sin** as one. Kuehl,

⁵ Ibid., ch. 1, lect. 6, 87.

however, following the opinion of St. Jerome, holds that there are here four distinct laws: the law of God and the law of sin, which are exterior to man, and the law of the mind and the law of the flesh, or that *other* law, which are within him.⁶

Another passage on the same is in Second Corinthians, where we read:

For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:3-6).

We will study what the spiritual weapons of warfare are in point four of today's discourse, but we do take hope in hearing that such weapons exist, and how powerful they are, if only we had faith! But he says "we destroy arguments and every proud obstacle," showing how arguments can be used by man to deceive himself as regards the truth; and how pride is a deadly obstacle to victory in spiritual combat.

You may have noticed the word "captive" used, which we just noted in the previous quote from Romans. There, he said, "a law... making me captive to the law of sin"; yet here we find, "we take every thought captive to obey Christ." This underscores the type of combat we must have: it must be that of conquest, and not that of sheer defense. We must conquer those regions of our souls darkened with sin, and in a sense we need to conquer other hearts to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. This calls to mind the promise of the Lord, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against the Church. Gates belong to walls and citadels: it is the Church who is doing the attack and siege. So Christ besieges every heart, longing in his mercy to save even the most pathetic sinner. Returning to this passage, however, we see that the booty, the prisoners of our spiritual battle are here described as our thoughts. Therefore, we must make our thoughts captive, and be ready when our interior selves put up a strong resistance to the holy Will of God; and the resistance will readily come in the form of arguments. For our thoughts often lead us astray, and is the first spot, usually, where the demons try to lure us into sin. The Serpent confused Eve's clarity of thought with lies; and a Psalm reads, "The Lord knows the thoughts of men, that they are vain" (Ps 93[94]:11).

Therefore we have two enemies: the demons of hell, and the interior tendencies of sin within our selves.

We now consider one last aspect in the description of spiritual combat which St. Paul provides, and it is the arena in which we wage this spiritual combat.

Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened [by which the Apostle means "baptized"], you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted

⁶ Rev. Charles Callan, O.P., *The Epistles of St. Paul: With Introductions and Commentary for Priests and Students*, vol. I, *Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians*, Joseph F. Wagner Inc. (New York: 1922), p. 119, at Rom 7:28.

the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised (Heb 10:32-36).

This arena of spiritual combat is the arena of suffering, and the arena of the practice of charity. In living out charity towards God and towards one's neighbor, the early Christian communities were regularly persecuted, even brutally.

Can we forget, also, the great passage of Second Corinthians, where Paul writes:

“With labors... imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the Churches (2 Cor 11:23-28).

Once again we see the mixture of suffering and love, of the cross and of service to others.

When in prayer you examine yourself on what spiritual battles you face, and your conduct in them, and what you are to do in order to improve, do not fail to first take an honest assessment of the crosses of the ordinary things of your daily lives. These are the arenas of your spiritual battles, and you do not need to seek strange or unusual places or situations to exercise the militancy proper to Catholic life.

In summary, then, for this second point of our talk, let us say that our enemy is twofold: the demons and our interior disorders; and the arena of spiritual combat is also twofold: the arena of the cross, and the arena of charity.

3. The Interior and Exterior Natures of our Spiritual Combat.

We now move to our third point, wherein we will consider the interior and exterior natures of spiritual combat; that is, the conflicts which come to us from the outside, and those from the inside. And on this point I will be more brief. Demons are outside us, but concupiscence is inside us; the objects and means with which they work can be inside or outside. Again, our crosses can be interior or exterior, as can our works of mercy.

The best passage with which to begin here is in Romans:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Rom 8:35)

Then, in order to reiterate, but expanding on this same thought by which he gives it more power and importance, he goes on:

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37-39).

Here St. Paul again points to the fallen angels as adversaries. He posits a list of extremes, (life, death, present, future, height, depth) by which he intends to encompass anything that reaches the extreme or falls short of it. Then he says, “nor anything else in all creation,” meaning that in creation there are things which will attempt to sever us from our goal of spiritual combat, namely, union with Christ forever in heaven.

4. The Weapons of Spiritual Combat

Let us now move on to our final point (the fourth), the weapons of spiritual combat. In the first three points, we have seen what we are trying to accomplish in spiritual combat and what we are trying to avoid, namely, heaven and hell. We have seen that the enemies are both the demons and concupiscence. We have seen that the battle wages both inside of us and the outside of us.

Any one of us, if we are in our right mind, should be reasonably terrified at this panorama. We should also look about us and see what weapons, what means of battle, are at our disposal.

St. Paul does not abandon us in this moment, he shows us what we are to do in order to be victorious in the battle. First he enumerates our weaponry, and second he tells us the one decisive factor with which we shall be successful, and without which we shall fail.

Let us begin with the weaponry. In a variety of places he enumerates what it is, but the best place to start is in this passage in Ephesians, which he wrote “in chains” (Eph 6:20). Some of it we read earlier this afternoon:

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 wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all take the shield of faith, with which you can quench 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. Pray 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” (Eph 6:10-18)

Here, St. Paul uses the expression, “put on the whole armor of God” twice. They form a sort of parentheses, and enable us to discern some structure to this passage. The parentheses surround the general thesis: the weapons of God are the only ones proportionate for the spiritual battle. Man has no hope of victory without them. Then after that, he begins a litany of weaponry, as metaphors for different aspects of spiritual combat. This list is as follows:

Loincloth: the truth.

Breastplate: righteousness.

Battle boots: gospel of peace.

Shield: faith.

Helmet: [the hope of]⁷ salvation.

Sword: this is a sword “of the Spirit,” and it is the Word of God.

Several paradigms can be discerned in this list. First, the Trinity; wherein the Father provides the first few items, but it is the Son who won us salvation, and the Spirit who, through the angels, gave men his Word.

Secondly, one sees the virtues; sincerity at the start, and then virtue, for both love of the truth and a life of virtue are the adequate preparation for the Gospel; then one sees charity in the battle boots of peace, faith in the shield, and hope in the helmet for we hope in our salvation; and finally, apostolic zeal, indicated by the sword. This is a perfect description of the virtues of a saint.

And thirdly, one can see different aspects of both defense and attack in spiritual combat, by armor which protects, such as breastplates and shields, and weapons which kill, such as swords.

Before moving on from this passage of Ephesians, let us also note that he includes “prayer and supplication,” very priestly acts, as a non-negotiable dimension of spiritual combat.

St. Paul was not the first to use such language. We find battle gear already in Isaiah, where he prophesies the Messiah in these words:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse... And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him... He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins (Is 11:1-2, 4-5).

And again, more strikingly akin to the passage of Ephesians six, Isaiah writes in chapter fifty-nine:

He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle (Is 59:17).

⁷ Cf. 1 Thes 5:6-9.

St. John Chrysostom wrote, “These are weapons of a totally new kind, for they have been forged for a previously unheard-of type of combat. I, who am a mere man, find myself called upon to deal blows to demons; I, who am clothed in flesh, find myself at war with incorporeal powers.”⁸

The Apostle uses similar terminology elsewhere. One place is in Hebrews. When contemporary theologians, eager to disassociate the Bible from the Apostles, endlessly argue that the topics and expressions in Hebrews are so dissimilar to the Epistles of Paul that it is impossible that he wrote it, a position with which I disagree, one cannot help but be struck with the fact that we find the very image of the sword being the Word of God, where he writes:

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:12).

Again we find the weaponry of spiritual combat stated in the Epistle which, among all those in the Canon, was earlier written than the rest, First Thessalonians:

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes 5:6-9).

This shows that from the earliest times of his Canonical Epistles to the end of his life “in chains,” St. Paul never wavered from his doctrine regarding the means with which we must wage spiritual combat.

Yet there is one weapon, the most obvious, and for that reason often the most easily forgotten, without which no battle can be won. We have hinted at this weapon in countless ways already, and this weapon is Jesus Christ the Lord.

The Psalm says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain” (Ps 127:1). This means that for all the effort we put into things, God alone makes all things be and move and live. And no matter how many guards you set upon the walls of the fortified city of your soul, it will be of no avail without the grace of Christ actually achieving the spiritual victory to which we aspire. The godless toil and barely find food; whereas God showers bread upon his beloved (cf. Ps. 127:2).

So many poor souls go about their own spiritual lives falling into one extreme or another. Some say that we have to leave everything up to God, so they fail to live the virtues, like souls who do not don the “full armor of God.” Others say that it’s all up to us, that we have to center our lives on virtues, but the pagans did this already such as the Stoics, and for all their effort, none of them was made holy in grace. And so the perfect balance is in the pursuit of virtue, not just for the vanity of virtue’s sake, but as a

⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Catechesis*, 3:11-12.

collaboration with God's grace, for God alone is the savior, and he will be your Savior, and Jesus will share the title of being Your Savior with no one, not even with you yourself.

This doctrine is found not only in Psalm 127, but all over the Old and New Testaments; but here we are focusing on St. Paul. Let us return to a passage we contemplated once already, but keep reading a couple sentences more than we did earlier:

I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members! Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:23).

Here St. Paul cries out, in the name of all the men in the whole history of the world who were born in Original Sin, and he cries out to Christ the Lord to save him from the slavery to sin.

The weapons of the spiritual life are those St. Paul listed, but Christ himself is the hero who battles to save us. By grace we are in union with him, and he lives in us. If the armor St. Paul describes metaphorically point to the Roman manner of girding for war, they are not exterior to us, but interior and of a divine quality. Let us never, then, think we can enter into spiritual warfare all by ourselves, when Christ alone is the savior of our souls.

Conclusion

Let us bring today's discourse to a conclusion.

We have seen the goal of spiritual combat: get into heaven and stay out of hell. We have seen the panorama of our battle, that our enemies are sometimes angels, and sometime the movement of our concupiscence; and that the arena of our combat, which is the exercise of charity and the carrying of our crosses. We have further seen that spiritual combat is both interior and exterior. Finally, we have meditated on the weapons with which we fight, and the unique and necessary role Christ has in our victory.

Let us then take all this to heart, and not go forth with drooping hands and the burden of discouragement. We are soldiers, fortified by the sacrament of confirmation to defend and extend the Catholic faith. We will suffer and be resisted, but, as Paul writes, "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood" (Heb 12:4).

We should also think not only of ourselves, but bring this militant dimension of our Catholic lives to bear while we carry out some sort of apostolate, starting with the obvious things like the home and the workplace. St. Paul wasn't in spiritual combat just for himself, but also for others; for it is impossible to love God without loving one's neighbor. The Apostle writes,

Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. *For this I toil, striving* with all the energy which he *mightily* inspires within me (Col 1:28-29).

St. Ambrose Autpert, whom we quoted at the beginning, reassures us in our spiritual battle, encouraging us to have clarity in taking sides for God and virtue, and against sin and vice:

The Lord has proposed only two doors and two ways (that is, the narrow door and the wide door, the steep road and the easy one); he has not pointed to a third way.⁹

Recently I returned from a youth pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Jesuit Martyrs in Midland, Ontario. Walking and camping for seventy miles or so, dealing with blisters and flies, amid Masses and rosaries and adoration and so much more, we were witnesses to these men who entered into spiritual combat in the early 1600's. They paid for victory with their lives. They did what St. Paul did, leaving every comfort they knew, exposing themselves to unavoidable and grave danger, all to save at least some souls. Ss. John de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant were tortured to death in unspeakably brutal ways for more than 16 hours... and their torturers were apostate Christians, baptized Hurons who returned to pagan ways. The higher God lifted them up, the lower they fell; but God's glory was shown in the Jesuit martyrs.

So do not be afraid at the difficulties of our time, the challenges of your temptations, or the shame of your falls; "in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood," as St. Paul reminds us (Heb 12:4). And if it comes to that, Christ will give you the victory, yes, with both hands, yet only if you really want it. Christ is the victor, the great soldier who alone could be victorious in this divine battle. St. Paul teaches us this, and how we are to fight and toil in union with him. May the intercession of St. Paul and the Blessed Virgin enable us to live up to so great a privilege.

Thank you for your kind attention.

⁹ Ambrose Autpert, *De cupiditate* 1: CCCM 27B, p. 963; cited in Pope Benedict XVI, "General Audience," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, n. 17, 29 April 2009, p. 15.