

Before the lectionary was revised after the Second Vatican Council, the reading that we heard today from the letter to the Romans was proclaimed every year on the first Sunday of Advent. It's kind of too bad that it was changed, because it is the perfect message for us as we prepare to welcome Christ at Christmas and as we try to get our lives in order to face him at the end of time. "Brothers and sisters, You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." If those words don't stir your soul, you belong in the cemetery, not the church. Wake up! Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light! This is a battle cry: Aragorn and the Men of the West in front of the gates of Mordor. Luke Skywalker and Rogue Squadron against the Death Star. The Avengers facing down Thanos. Against the forces of darkness there can be no compromise.

At this point I should probably acknowledge that Paul is speaking about morality and not so much about spiritual warfare although these interpretations aren't mutually exclusive. Paul believed that when we encounter the gospel, we have to accept it or reject it; we cannot sit on the fence. If we accept the gospel message, then we are called to act accordingly.

We have to leave our old lives--our lives of sin and darkness--behind us. Christ has woken us up and now we have to take off our pajamas and get ready to go out and face the world. For Paul, there can be no compromise--we have to leave our old selves behind and take up our new lives in the light of the gospel. As we all know...this is not easy to do. This is why whenever this passage is read, in our minds, we should hear trumpets and bugles and the sounds of feet marching into battle--because that's exactly what we are marching into. Life in Christ is a constant battle against the forces of darkness. The enemy is going to do everything he can to distract us and to convince us that he's not really there. It's a trap. He's waiting to ambush us and drag us back into the darkness.

How can we be strong in this war for our very souls? First have a strong prayer life. If you've gotten lazy with your prayers, fix that today. Make an Advent resolution to get up 15 minutes early to pray or set aside 30 minutes before you go to bed to read the scriptures. When you pray the rosary, really PRAY the rosary--meditating on each of the mysteries rather than just rushing through the prayers.

The best way to protect yourself from attacks of the enemy is to go to Confession and receive Communion on a regular basis. If you can't receive

communion, make an act of spiritual communion: ask Jesus to unite himself to you spiritually. Conforming our lives to Jesus and his gospel is the best possible protection against the enemy trying to defeat us. If we are living our lives in the sacraments we are wearing the armor of light.

It is time for us to rise from our slumber and put on the armor of Christ.