

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Powers

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-17

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the principalities, against powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Commentary

St John, in the Book of Revelation (22:8), and St Paul, in his letter to the Romans (1:25), both warn us against the worship of angels.

Instead, mortals and angels should unite in the worship of Almighty God. It is an insight taken up in the liturgy of the Eucharist when the priest says, “Therefore **with** angels and Archangels and the whole company of Heaven, **we**....”

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that the Ascended Christ is ‘superior to angels,’ (1:4) and St Paul writes that He, ‘has triumphed over the

principalities and powers.’ (Col: 2:18) Here we get an indication that not all heavenly beings are benign – there are ‘spiritual forces of evil...’

The angelic Powers we are considering today are often represented as warrior angels wearing full armour and helmet and holding weapons such as shields, spears or chains. ‘Powers’ are angels who fight against evil and wickedness.

The ‘Power’ in our stained-glass window may not have armour but is holding a whip and there is no doubt he has vanquished evil: the dragon, symbol of the devil, is held by a chain.

‘Powers’ are so called because they have power over evil. They support those who resist temptation to say and do what is wicked and harmful to others, to themselves and to creation. They strengthen us in our spiritual struggle with passions and vices which may destroy us, with evil thoughts and slanders against others.

St Paul sums up the conflict with the hearts and minds of all Christians when he writes to the Romans out of his own experience of the spiritual life as a disciple of Christ: “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:19)

Baron von Hügel, a philosopher and famous spiritual director, who died in 1925, gave this wise spiritual advice to modern day Christians:

“the reality of Evil is beyond any direct explanation by anyone – the true state of affairs here is not that believers can explain and that unbelievers cannot explain, still less that Christians cannot explain but

that sceptics can. No: but that Christianity does, if something other, yet something more than explain Evil. Christianity has immensely increased the range and depth of our insight as to Evil; and at the same time, Christianity alone has given man the motives and the power not only to trust on, unshaken, in the spiritual sun, in God, in spite of these sunspots of Evil, but to transform Evil into an instrument of Good.”

Meditation

Examine your conscience to see how the deadly vices are at work in your life. Slowly and prayerfully read through each vice and see how it may be leading you into sin and even wickedness.

Pride - an excessive belief in one's abilities.

Practice the virtue of humility

Envy – the desire or resentment for things, relationships, status, or abilities that other people have.

Practice charity and goodwill to others

Gluttony - a desire to consume more than you require, over- indulgence in food or drink. Practice moderation.

Lust - a craving for sexual pleasure which tends to see others as objects of our personal gratification.

Practice chastity in all relationships, which is the honouring of the dignity of others and a commitment to their good.

Anger - a feeling, or even an eruption, of displeasure with people or a situation, a seeking of vengeance.

Practice gentleness, quietness and calmness.

Avarice is greed - a desire for material gain.

Practice – generosity and kindness

Sloth - laziness, the desire to avoid work, a lack of spiritual or physical effort. Practice enthusiasm for a cause or an objective.

Prayer

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, His shield to ward,
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.
Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

St Patrick's Breastplate Tr Mrs C.F. Alexander 1818-95