



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

For the Twenty-First Sunday After Trinity – October 24, 2021

*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...”*

Ephesians 6:12a (NIV)

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went camping. After dinner and a bottle of wine, they laid down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke, nudged his faithful friend, and said:

*“Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.”*

Dr. Watson replied:

*“I see millions of stars.”*

Holmes then asked him:

*“And what does that tell you?”*

Dr. Watson pondered for a minute before answering:

*“Astronomically, it tells me that there are billions of galaxies and potentially trillions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. And theologically, I can see that God is all powerful and that we are small and insignificant. What does it tell you Holmes?”*

Sherlock Holmes was silent for a moment and then spoke:

*“Watson you idiot – someone has stolen our tent!”*



Other than a well-equipped RV or a fully loaded trailer, a tent is the most important piece of equipment a person can bring on a camping trip. In short, a tent is one’s “home away from home” because (other than from falling trees or lightning strikes), a tent provides protection from most of the elements that Mother Nature can throw a person’s way including, it would seem, the occasional bear attack.

Case in point:

Steven Herrero, who has spent his adult life working as a bear behavioural scientist and biologist, writes on page 125 of his 2002 book, “Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance”:

*“I have mentioned that another technique for minimizing risk while backcountry camping around bears is to sleep in a tent rather than without shelter. Sleeping under the stars is one of my favourite things to do while camping, but I choose areas in which to do this carefully. My data strongly suggest that people sleeping without tents were more likely to be injured, even killed (by bears), than were people who slept in tents.”*

Regardless, most of the time campers just go inside their tents to sleep and don’t really think too much of it. Occasionally, though, either:

-  **they get caught in a rainstorm; or**
-  **the bugs become so fierce that campers need to spend a few hours hiding inside the protective confines of their tents.**

At those times, there is nothing more satisfying than:

- 👂 hearing the torrential downpour on the outside of the tent, but being bone dry on the inside; or
- 👂 listening to the terrifying symphony of blackflies and mosquitoes that would literally suck the campers dry (if only they could get at them) but knowing that the bugs can't get through the impenetrable armour of the tent's nylon walls.



- 👍 To be sure, therefore, when camping, having a tent means being “protected”.

It is not surprising, then, that tents are mentioned throughout Holy Scripture **for the same reason**. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 St. Paul uses the word “tent” to denote the earthly human body:

*“For we know that if our earthly house, this TENT, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this TENT groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, Who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”*

Again, when St. Paul states in verse 1a,

*“... our earthly home, this tent...”*

he is referring to our earthly body, our temporary dwelling place. In addition, when St. Paul declares in verse 5b:

*“... Who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee...”*

he is referring to God's gift to us of His Holy Spirit – not only as “Comforter”, but as “Protector”.

☞ **For the simple truth is, believers in Jesus Christ are merely wanderers on this earth; in short, they are not “at home” in this world and need constant protection from it.**

Thus, St. Paul promises us in verses 1b and 3c:

- 🔥 **those who belong to God will be “further clothed” with immortality upon their deaths and**
- 🔥 **their frail earthly tents – their bodies – will be replaced with permanent “heavenly dwellings”.**

Moreover, as verse 5 clearly indicates, while we struggle here on earth, God Himself does the work of preparing us for the day of glorification and immortality, through the continual process of:

- 🕊 **sanctification;**
- 🕊 **comfort; and**
- 🕊 **protection**

by His Holy Spirit.

Finally, that constant work happening within us is Almighty God's “guarantee” that both our eternal inheritance and our heavenly dwelling are real, as St. Paul further assures us in Ephesians 1:13-15:

*“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”*



In any event, most conservative biblical scholars believe that:

 **St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians c. 60 AD while he was being held prisoner awaiting his first trial in Rome; and**  
 **when he wrote Ephesians 6:10-20 about the “Armour of God” (today’s Epistle Lesson), St. Paul had drawn inspiration from the Roman soldiers who had been assigned to guard him.**

Specifically, St. Paul used the armour of the Roman soldier as a metaphor to illustrate a spiritual truth that:

 **Throughout life’s struggles, God has given us “spiritual armour” to protect the “tents of our earthly bodies” as we wage war against the dark spiritual forces that assail us daily.**

Now, I realize that we live in a world that operates on ‘hard facts’, and that the spiritual side of life seems so **unreal** in this age of:

 **computers;**  
 **cell phones; and**  
 **social media.**

**Nonetheless, the spiritual world, which includes the forces of both:**

 **light; and**  
 **darkness,**

**is very much a REALITY.**

Accordingly, St. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church warning them about the real enemy of their faith, a dangerous foe that must be continually fought on a **spiritual battlefield**. In so doing, St. Paul reminded them (and reminds us) that the true struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against dark spiritual forces. For this reason, St. Paul (in verse 12b) deliberately uses the expression:

*“...the powers of this dark world...”*

to aptly describe the devil’s demonic forces.

Even so, fear was never an issue to St. Paul, **but DECEPTION was**. Thus, St. Paul firmly believed in the reality of the devil’s existence. As a result, his instruction to the Ephesian church (in verse 11) was:

- ⚠ **to be aware of the “devil’s schemes”;**
- ⚠ **to stand strong against the one who desired, above all, to destroy their eternal lives; and**
- ⚠ **to understand the need to use “spiritual armour” to effectively battle with him.**

Consequently, St. Paul uses an example which was familiar to his audience:

🛡 **“The Roman Soldier and His Armour”.**

You see, without his protective armour, a soldier was as good as dead in the heat of a battle. In the same way, St. Paul challenged all his readers either to fight their spiritual battles:

- 🛡 **covered with Jesus as their protection; or**
- 👉 **to expect ineffective ministries and defeated lives.**

Clearly, then, St. Paul’s intention was to give all true Christians a method for spiritual victory.



- 👉 **The belt was foundational for battle; it supported the weapons that allowed the soldier to fight.**

The *“belt of truth”* (verse 14b) is a reminder that Jesus Christ is the foundation for spiritual battle. He is the truth that stands against the lies and deception of Satan; thus, to win our spiritual battles, we must be anchored to the truth found in Jesus alone.



🛡️ **The breastplate was, simply, to protect the soldier’s vital organs in close hand-to-hand combat. It was essential for survival and no trained Roman soldier would venture into battle without it.**

If we start to believe that our own:

- 👉 **righteousness;**
- 👉 **effort; or**
- 👉 **good works**

make us worthy of God’s protection, the advantage quickly goes to our enemy. In short, our own merits are worthless in the battle. We need to get our eyes off ourselves, and back on the provision of the cross, and the *“breastplate of righteousness”* (verse 14c) that is ours through a living relationship with Jesus Christ.



👣 **Without his sandals, a soldier would not be prepared to fight and could be easily defeated.**

In verse 15, St. Paul instructs us that our preparation for battle is to be shod with:

*“... the gospel (that is, the ‘good news’) of peace...”*,

(the Gospel being:

- ☩ **Jesus Christ's meritorious life;**
- † **His precious death;**
- 👤 **His mighty resurrection; and**
- ☩ **His glorious ascension),**

for Jesus' reconciling work on earth, on behalf of all humankind, brought us peace with God, and allows us to meet the enemy with:

- 👤 **boldness;**
- 👤 **confidence;**
- 👤 **perseverance; and**
- 👤 **peace of mind.**



- 👤 **In ancient warfare, the shield was the only protection against the “flaming arrows” that rained down from the sky. If used correctly, it was a trustworthy piece of equipment. If dropped, it became useless, and the soldier's fate rested with himself.**

As St. Paul urges (verse 16a), we must take up the “*shield of faith*” and trust in Jesus alone to protect us. We cannot rely on our own abilities in this battle.



- 👤 **The helmet was essential for the survival of a soldier in battle.**

In using the term “*helmet of salvation*” (verse 17a), St. Paul, indicates that the helmet is the source of total deliverance, that in Jesus Christ we can find deliverance in every situation:

† spiritual;  
† emotional; and  
† physical.

Hence, Jesus – alone – must be:

☩ our source;  
☩ our guide; and  
☩ our “way out”,

as we are, quite simply, unable to deliver ourselves.



✕ **When used at close range by a skilled Roman soldier, the sword was a deadly weapon.**

Now, the first five pieces of armour were all primarily used for defensive purposes. Consequently, if we take St. Paul’s sage advice to stand firm and allow God to fight for us (verses 11-16), our spiritual armour – the “Armour of God” – will defend and protect us. Conversely, the “*sword of the spirit*” (verse 17b) is the only piece of armour used for offensive purposes – **and it is all we need.**

According to St. Paul, the sword represents the “Word of God”, the written picture of Jesus Christ, for He is the living version of everything that God wanted to say to humanity. God’s Word is a powerful weapon against the enemy when it is used under the Holy Spirit’s power and direction. Thus, it is vital that all **true** Christians are well acquainted with the Word of God – because Holy Scripture (that is to say, the “Sword of the Spirit”) – is all we need to thwart the devil’s schemes. However, we need to know it – and we need to know how to use it and how to apply it – for the devil, the real enemy, is crafty. (For example, in St. Matthew 4:1-11, when he tempted Jesus

in the wilderness, the devil quoted from Holy Scripture, albeit out of context. Nevertheless, Jesus, as “The Word of God,” knew His Holy Scripture fully, and He completely undid the devil’s schemes by properly applying it.)



 **Still, the devil is relentless; he does not give up!**

And I fear that in today’s world he is rapidly gaining ground – all because many Christians no longer care to read, let alone know, their Bibles. It seems as if they are blissfully unaware that:

-  **there is even a battle going on; and**
-  **they are in the midst of that battle UNPROTECTED.**

It’s kind of like going camping without a tent – except that being devoured by a bear (or, even, swarms of voracious blackflies and mosquitoes) would seem like a walk in the park by comparison.



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