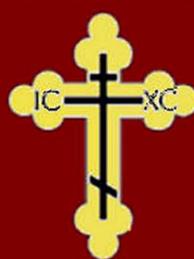


ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

Next Services

Saturday, December 8th

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

**Fr. Peter is available to hear
confessions before Vespers by
appointment.**

Sunday, December 9th

**Matins
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow
at**

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**



Above: an angel carrying Prophet Habakkuk to Daniel. Habakkuk holds a basket in his hands filled with food that will help revive Daniel's strength (Dan. 14: 33-37). The icon is from a 13th-15th century Georgian manuscript.

27th Sunday of Pentecost - Ephesians 6: 10-17

*Note: the following article was written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

Do you know of anyone, anyone at all, who hates you with a blazing hatred? whose passionate desire is that only bad things happen to you? who'd gleefully burn you alive and bring you back to life just to burn you again and again and again? Well, someone does hate you that much and does hate me that much: Satan, the Devil. He hates you and me maybe even more than he hates God, because we still can do what he refuses to do: repent of our sins, be reconciled to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, and be happy with God forever in heaven. That's why today's Epistle, Ephesians 6:10-17 begins by urging us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," because like it or not, you and I are soldiers in a spiritual war in which there is and can be no neutrality, no middle ground, no compromise and no surrender.

Now, this war has already been won by Christ's resurrection victory over sin, death, and hell. Revelation 20:10 proclaims that in the end "the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever;" while verse 14 says that "then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." The very nanosecond Jesus Christ arose from the dead, the Devil lost the whole war. But the battles rage on. Our enemy, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience," seeks to hurt God by leading men and women on a pathway of rebellion and to hurt us humans simply because "misery loves company." Satan and his fallen angels are never going to be happy; and out of sheer spite they want to drag us down to suffer with them. So it's important for Christians to review our understanding of this ongoing spiritual war, lest we become casualties in this great battle.

And the first thing to understand, says St. Paul in verse 12, is that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts [armies] of wickedness in the heavenlies [the spiritual realm]." When there's conflict among us; when things like gossip and backbiting and arguments get really personal, we assume it's just our fallen and sinful nature asserting itself. Wrong! Our adversary in spiritual warfare, the Devil and his fallen angels, are constantly scheming to divide, conquer and ruin us.

Look at some of Satan's schemes against us that Scripture exposes. Why is it that some people come to faith in Christ and others don't? 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that the Enemy, "the god of this age," blinds the minds of people who are not yet believers, "lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God, shine on them." How is it that a person can come to church, hear the Scriptures read and explained, hear the prayers, yet nothing happens in their hearts? In Matthew 13:19 the Lord Jesus says it's because "the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart." Why in a parish do some folks oppose good, godly, scripturally-sound pastoral leadership, instead of being open and teachable? 2 Timothy 2:26 says it's "the snare [trap] of the devil" by which people have "been taken captive to do [Satan's] will." Meanwhile, 2 Corinthians 11:14 warns that the Devil masquerades as "an angel of light," to mislead us with false teaching. One of Satan's favorite schemes is destroying the unity of the Body of Christ by sowing seeds of argument, discord, fighting. Revelation 12:10 exposes the source of such discord: it's Satan who is "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night;" and Ephesians 4:26-27 clues us in on how Satan stirs up such trouble between and among us when it tells us what not to do: "'Be angry and do not sin;' do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil." Because we're individuals, we will sometimes disagree. But must never let disagreement curdle into an angry fight and, even worse, a grudge we hang onto, because that just opens the front door and lets the devil walk right in.

Bottom line? 1 Peter 5:8 tells us bluntly to shake off our delusion of spiritual invulnerability, and instead "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Now, the Devil, as a fallen angel, is not God's opposite; he's not equal to God in power and strength. He's a strong creature, alright, but only a creature; and he can be overcome by the power of God which is within us by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as we're assured in 1 John 4:4, "Greater is He [the Holy Spirit] Who is in you than he [the Devil] who is in the world." So we need not ever be afraid. But we do have to accept that in this war we are soldiers on the front lines. And as soldiers we need to put on "the armor of God," all the equipment and protection God so generously provides to us, so that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day," to hang in there and fight the good fight; so that when the battle is over and the smoke clears, "having done all [we will be able] to stand," still to be on our feet, not face down and dead in the mud of sin and defeat.

And that starts with "having girded our waist with truth." For the Roman soldier St. Paul is using as a model, the most important piece of equipment was his wide leather belt which protected his guts and from which all his other pieces of equipment were hung. It is knowing what's true, especially what the truth is about God and His love and His power and His purposes for and promises to us, that's the most important piece of our equipment. And we're not just talking about the facts here, but about the personal application of the facts. Does God really love me? Did Jesus really die and rise again for me? Even when everything in my life is going to hell in a handcart and all my hopes and dreams lie shattered at my feet, is God still with me, to bring me through this to help and healing and wholeness? If the belt of truth in my life, from which all else hangs, is the truth of Romans 8:38-39 "that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord," I'm going to make it.

Then, says the Apostle, "put on the breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate, made of metal or cured leather, covered the chest, protecting the vital organs. Ah, but whose righteousness protects us? First and foremost, it is the righteousness, that being in right relationship with God, that we receive in Christ, as the Apostle explains in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For [God the Father] made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us [on our behalf], that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." But putting on Christ's righteousness is also a commitment to being an imitator of Christ and therefore to do the right thing in all our dealings. Look: one of the things that makes us doubt God's love and care for us, and makes our hearts vulnerable to despair, is our own guilt, knowing only too clearly just how unrighteous we are in our thoughts, words, and actions. And the protection we need, God has already given us: our repentance and His forgiveness. "If we confess our sins," says 1 John 1:9, God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness."

Next, says St. Paul, we need to be shod "with the preparation of the gospel of peace." The Gospel, the Good News, is that because of Jesus Christ and what He accomplished for us in His death and Resurrection, we can and we do have peace with God; and that reality, like really good football cleats, gives us good traction when life gets slippery with sin and struggle. But along with good traction we need to take up "the shield of faith with which [we] will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." It's faith, trusting God and trusting in the truthfulness of His Word, regardless of our ups and downs, which turns to nothing all the fiery arrows of doubt and fear that the Evil One loves to throw at us just to mess with our mind. And that leads to the need for "the helmet of salvation." A helmet protects the head, right? And what do our heads need protecting against? How about doubt, fear, confusion, anger, all the passions? But if I know that, as I insisted during my Holy Baptism, "I do unite myself to Christ" and "I have united myself to Christ" in His death and Resurrection, then I can know for certain that what the Apostle says in Ephesians 1:19-21 is true for me: that in Christ, the Father "raised me from the dead and seated me at His right hand in the heavenly places." And what enables me to kill off what attacks me is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." In Matthew 4:1-11, how did our Lord defeat each of the three temptations the Devil threw at Him? By knowing, and taking His stand on, the Word of God revealed in Sacred Scripture, saying simply "It is written." Knowing and taking our stand on the Scriptures is the weapon we use to defeat our enemy. And we fight our battles, says verse 18, by "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints," all our fellow believers. As odd as it may seem, as we pray for each other in love, we win these battles on our knees.