

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B November 15, 2009

Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32

Your Mother Wears Combat Boots

Your mother wears combat boots! Back in my day, that was one of the most derogatory statements one young boy would make to another. Unfortunately, today's young people have ratcheted up their attacks on one another and become much less civil. Your Mother wears combat boots! Father Corapi addressed these words to us a few years back when we attended a *Call to Holiness* conference. It was a reminder that we are in a battle against the evil one, and that Mary, our Mother, is fighting side-by-side with us trying to defend her children. And the rosary is one of our strongest weapon.

But we also have another very important figure leading us in the battle and that is St. Michael the Archangel. We hear about him in our first reading this morning from the prophet Daniel. God tells Daniel: *“At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book.”* Those on the right side of the battle will escape, but those who are not *“shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.”* It's important for us to pick the right side of the battle.

This time of unsurpassed distress is often referred to as the tribulation that will occur before Jesus comes again. Jesus tells His disciples in the gospel this morning: *“But in those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather (his) elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.”* The tribulation or trial comes first and then Jesus will come again.

The Catechism summarizes it this way: *“Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the ‘mystery of antiquity’ in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.”* (CCC #675)

We are coming to the end of the Church liturgical year; only two weeks left. Two week from today we will celebrate the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new year. And, as is always the case, we end the year reflecting on the end times and on the second coming of Christ. As we start to get ready to celebrate the first coming of Christ, we take some time to contemplate whether we are ready for his second coming. We ask ourselves if our faith is strong enough that it will not be shaken during a time of tribulation. We ask if our faith is strong enough that we will be able to endure persecutions associated with the tribulation. We ask ourselves if our faith is strong enough to resist the deceptions that will try to lead us away from the truth. And, of

course, we need to always be looking to try to read the signs of the times to know if we are maybe already in the final trial. The catechism quote I just referenced said that the time of trial will include the deception **“by which man glorifies himself in place of God.”** We look around our society and we can ask whether maybe we are already there or, at least, rapidly heading in that direction. We can look at society—we can look in the mirror—and ask if we see man glorifying himself instead of God.

We need to be prepared for battle each and every day. Whether we are in, or approaching, the final battle I cannot say, but we are in a battle nonetheless. The good news is that we know that we are on the winning side as long as we don't abandon the fight. I'm happy to be in the ranks behind Mary and St. Michael. Pray to both of them for help and guidance in your daily battles. Pray the rosary and also pray the St. Michael Prayer.

The St. Michael Prayer was written by Pope Leo XIII. There are many conflicting stories about the incidents and the vision that led the pope to write the prayer. Here is one: **“It is said that one day having celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, the aged Pontiff Leo XIII was in conference with the Cardinals. Suddenly he sank to the floor in a deep swoon. Physicians who hastened to his side feared that he had already expired, for they could find no trace of his pulse. However, after a short interval the Holy Father rallied, and opening his eyes exclaimed with great emotion: ‘Oh what a horrible picture I was permitted to see!’ He had been shown in spirit the tremendous activities of the evil spirits and their ravings against the Church. But in the midst of this vision of horror he had also beheld consoling visions of the glorious Archangel Michael, who had appeared and cast Satan and his legions back into the abyss of hell. Soon afterward he composed the well-known prayer.”** This is the prayer:

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into Hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

The pope composed this prayer in 1884 and it was said after every Mass for eighty years until 1964. Some of you may be old enough to remember. While we no longer say the prayer after every Mass, in 1994 Pope John Paul II encouraged us to continue praying it. This is what he said: **“May prayer strengthen us for the spiritual battle we are told about in the Letter to the Ephesians: ‘Draw strength from the Lord and from His mighty power’ (Ephesians 6:10). The Book of Revelation refers to this same battle, recalling before our eyes the image of St. Michael the Archangel (Revelation 12:7). Pope Leo XIII certainly had a very vivid recollection of this scene when, at the end of the last century, he introduced a special prayer to St. Michael throughout the Church. Although this prayer is no longer recited at the end of Mass, I ask everyone not to forget it and to recite it to obtain help in the battle against forces of darkness and against the spirit of this world.”**

Pray the St. Michael Prayer daily after praying the rosary. And oh yeah, your Mother wears combat boots!

Deacon Joe Hulway