

Trinity 21 (2025)

Back in the 90s I was privileged to assist with the funeral of a high-ranking military officer.

Walking behind a horse-drawn caisson in Arlington National Cemetery as the band played such hymns as “Onward, Christian Soldiers” and “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” was a moving experience, one I shall never forget.

There is something about military ceremonies which command respect and speak to the heart.

Behind these ceremonies is the mystique of the warrior, true and brave . . . someone who denies self, takes on discipline and loves liberty more than life.

Cecil Rice’s patriotic hymn puts these thoughts into verse:

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that
 stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

Words such as these are not meant to glorify war. Perish the thought! God forbid!

As anyone who has seen her face will tell you, war is hell. As Christians, we should pray and work for peace and be on guard against those who clamour for conflict so that they will reap monetarily gain . . . the “military industrial complex”, to quote President Eisenhower.

That being said, we do right to remember that freedom is not free and to pause -- as we do this day -- to honour and remember those who have bequeathed it to us at great price.

Not all, though, agree. One person posted on Facebook this past week that recognizing veterans in Church is wrong. The Church should stick to ‘spiritual’ things and not mix Church and ‘empire’ (I think was the terms she used).

I partially agree with her. The primary focus of the Church should indeed be announcing Jesus as the true and coming king, making disciples of all nations and teaching its members to live lives of beauty, piety and truth, as well as picking up those who have fallen prey to the lies and deceits of the world system.

But here is where I would disagree: Jesus is Lord of ALL. And I do mean, all.

“Saving souls” is important and primary, but God wants His people to be wisely governed in this present age. The political state is part of God’s plan and merits the attention and prayers of Christian people. Paul says as much in 2 Timothy 2:1,2:

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.”

It should be noted here that the authorities to which Paul refers were pagan.

That being the case, how much more should those who bear the authority of government in Christian lands be lifted up by God’s people.

Those who serve in this capacity should see themselves as God’s under-shepherds and should govern accordingly

Laws should be made under God, in the light of the Gospel and for the good of all people whether they be Christian or not.

Church and state have distinct but complementary roles. Both operate under the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. So today, without apology, we honor and recognize those who are the guardians of our liberties.

With that introduction, I want now to call to your attention something you probably already know: the Bible frequently makes use of military imagery.

For example, in Isaiah 59, after finding no one to rescue His people, God puts on the armour of soldier. In verses 16 and 17, we read:

“And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation . . .”

“For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.”

These are the words of Scripture, but what are their implications in the world in which you and I find ourselves? /// Let me offer this suggestion:

If you think about it, humans – all of us – come into this world in a state of ‘bondage’. We are under the power of an unseen enemy.

--We are born self-centred.

--We often get love the wrong way round. Instead of loving people and using things, we love things and use people.

--We have an insatiable appetite for more. “If I just had a new car, boat, house . . . put anything you want in the blank . . . I would be happy.” But this happiness does not come. No sooner than we have picked up one toy, we want another and another.

--We don't live up to our own ideals and standards of behaviour. Something within us tells us that we ought to be kind, fair, brave, generous, to stand up for the rights of the weak. Yet we often find ourselves missing the mark. As a result, consciously or unconsciously, we carry around a bag of guilt and shame.

--And finally, we attempt to do life on our own terms, to define ourselves. With the poet we cry out: *I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*

Where does this radical autonomy lead? ///

Discontent, restlessness, meaninglessness, alienation, cosmic loneliness, various addictions and ultimately, death.

One darned thing after another and then you die. This is way many people experience life.

What is the answer?

The Christian answer is we are in bondage to a dark power and need rescue. The good news is that what we humans need God has provided.

In the person of His Son Jesus, God has put on the garments of war and come to our rescue.

This battle was fought and won on the cross, once and for all. The just died for the unjust.

A Redeemer has come to Zion, again quoting Isaiah 59.

If you find yourself in a 'pit' this morning, no matter how deep, know that there is hope.

In your mind's eye, picture Jesus, the Incarnate One, putting on the armour of a soldier and coming to do battle on your behalf.

Lay down your self-conceit. Seek His help.
Let Him set you free from the captivity of sin
and self. Let Him make you truly free. ///

But, in Scripture, we find the imagery of the
soldier used another way.

In the New Testament, particularly in the
writings of Paul, we find that those who have
been set free from the captivity of sin have been
summoned to join in that fight. To quote the
Prayer Book, **“to fight manfully under
Christ’s banner against sin, the world and
the devil.”**

In Ephesians 6, verses 11 and 12, Paul gives
this charge: **“Put on the whole armour of God,
that ye may be able to stand against the wiles
of the devil.”**

The fight we are called to join in is a war of
ideas and worldviews and indeed against
demonic forces. To quote J.B. Phillip’s

translation: **“We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.”**

It is against these foes that Jesus’ people are to stand their ground, and there are plenty of opportunities for doing this in today’s culture. Allow me to offer these suggestions:

First, know a war going. Not only are individuals under attack, but so are the key institutions of Western society: the home, the school and the church.

Children and young people are at the centre of Satan’s attack.

Capture their little minds, hearts, imaginations . . . get them addicted to the junk of this world, and down comes Christian civilisation, and this is what we see happening.

So, if you have a child or grandchild or godchild, focus on him or her. Claim that child for Christ, before he is claimed by what he finds on his tablet and in many schools. Read to him good books. Pray for him. Take him to church. Model moderation, civility, thanksgiving, courtesy and forgiveness at home.

Don't give him or her over to be the prey of the devil. Be on guard.

Secondly, know you are not alone in this fight. Paul in today's passage says, "Be strong **in the Lord.**" When you are faced with temptations, perplexities and complex issues, don't tackle these matters in your own wisdom and strength. Claim the power that has been promised.

Thirdly, dress for battle. Put on the protective clothing God has provided, as well as taking hold of the sword of the spirit, the Word

of God. Let the Bible is your field manual. Let faith be your watchword. ///

As I close -- Remember, those old war-time posters where Uncle Sam is pictured pointing his finger and saying: **“I want you.”**

Well, re-imagine those posters with Jesus at the centre, pointing and saying the same words.

Let me conclude by encouraging you to go down to the ‘recruitment office’ today and enlist in Christ’s army. When you get there say:

“Lord, I am here reporting for duty. Use me as you please. Arm me with your truth. Clothe me with the armour of your protection. Teach my fingers to fight.

“Make me brave, noble and fearless. Keep my heart pure and undivided.

“Thank you for counting me worthy to serve in your army under your command.”