

# Sisters of Jesus Good Shepherd Pastorelle



Itinerary of the Lectio Divina  
in preparation of the Seminar  
on the ministry of pastoral care

Worksheet 5

# **“Take therefore the armor of God”**

Eph. 6:10-20

## **1. The context**

The conclusion of the letter to the Ephesians has a clear dramatic tone. If on the other part, for many times, the author remembered the indicative of salvation, that is the gift which has already been given to the believers – the new life - now the exhortation is pressing and urgent, in the awareness that to face the battle a suitable equipment is necessary, an accurate fight order, proportionate to the nature of the adversaries. The text has as center the description of the armor that the believer has to put on (vv. 14-17), preceded by a description of the adversaries (vv. 10-13) and followed by a last exhortation to be vigilant in prayer (vv. 18-20) that the apostle also asks for himself, to be able to continue to proclaim with boldness the Gospel in the midst of difficulties and chains.

## **2. The text**

**vv. 10-13:** The tone of the reflection suddenly changes, it passes in fact from the recommendations about family and social life (cf. 5:21-6:9) to a perspective of comparison and battle that would seem to surpass whoever, considering the nature of the adversaries. The biblical passage opens with an imperative that intends to call the attention: “Be strong in the Lord”. It is important that he who faces the battle knows how to lean on the strength that can come only from God. This means that the believer doesn’t have to seek elsewhere that capacity of resistance which in reality has been given to him, if he accepts to put on the armor of God. The combat in fact, is not against human entity but against he who often hides himself behind those realities that try to oppose the design of God: the devil. With apocalyptic terminology, the author individualizes in these *dark and tenebrous principalities* that interpose between the world of God and the world of men, the true adversaries of the believer: “The believer is everything at the presence of the threatening, invisible but real powers, which eventually take the form of personages, events, historical conditions, but they don’t reduce themselves to these, on the contrary they transcend their every worldly manifestation.” (Penna)

**vv. 14-17:** After having underlined the situation, the apostle describes the single elements of the armor: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword. The belt is used to fasten the vest and therefore to favor the movement of the legs along the way and also to allow rapid movements; the expression “*gird your loins*” is synonymous to “*be ready*”. It is in fact, the order that God gave to his people in the context of the exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:10); there is also another text of messianic vein in a circumstance of war confrontation and constitutes the

foundation to which the author is inspired: "Justice shall be the band around his waist and faithfulness a belt upon his hips" (Is. 11:5). In our case, the belt is the truth which is a stable fidelity, wherein man experiences in this battle the nearness of God who allows him freedom of movement and at the same time a secure stability.

The breastplate to protect the chest is justice, which is understood both as behavior conformed to the law and as the gift that comes from God that justifies the sinner and renders him just.

The shoes necessary to complete long journeys are for announcing the Gospel of peace, that is to proclaim that peace that Christ's death and resurrection have inaugurated definitely.

The shield, essentially defensive weapon is the faith. In the Old Testament it is often referred to God who protects his people: "The Lord is your saving shield (Dt. 33:29). Here it is associated to faith "which is celebrated as shelter and guarantee of invulnerability, as suggested by the simple etymology of the Jewish verb 'âman' «to hold firmly, to be stable and faithful, to attach solidly, to believe» (Penna).

The helmet of salvation: "Like the image of the breastplate, the author is inspired by Is. 59:17, where the helmet of salvation is brought by God who goes out to help his people. The letter to the Ephesians already gives the name of salvation to the salvific reality offered by God in the present; it constitutes an effective defense in the battle to direct now" (Rossé).

Finally the Christian receives from God an offensive weapon: the sword. The sword of the Spirit, that is God's Word, that Word in which the force of the Spirit acts. The Word of God as compared to a sword has a long biblical tradition behind it (Hos. 6:5; Is. 11:4; Heb. 4:12; 2Thes. 2:8; Rev. 1:16; 2:12).

**vv. 18-20:** The final exhortation closes the whole section of the battle of the Christian emphasizing that which according to importance, is the weapon most effective against the assaults of the enemy: prayer. The theme of prayer calls to mind Colossians 4:2-4, even if here a particular insistence is observed. Prayer doesn't have to have limits of time and has to be done with insistence *in the Spirit*. Besides, prayer has an explicit destination: it has to be for all the members of the Church (*the saints*), but particularly for Paul so that he may continue to announce the word of the Gospel with boldness. The apostle doesn't ask to be exempted from the test, but to be able to offer in trial his testimony. The literal translation of this expression is meaningful: "that I may be given the word in the opening of my mouth". The word received is that of God, of which the apostle is a servant. In other words, he asks to be a faithful instrument in communicating the Word of God, particularly the mystery of the Gospel, which is the great design of salvation that is definitively actualized in Christ.

### 3 Actualization

For many times in the course of the letter, the author has reminded his hearers the gift of grace that they have received with Baptism which has rendered them *'new person,'* that is, members of the body of Christ and sharers of the new life in Christ. The point of departure could not be otherwise but this: you have been freed and saved. The beginning of a journey of faith can never be in man, but is always a free and gratuitous action of God. From this awareness is born the commitment and the struggle to preserve and deepen the gift received. The experience of salvation received does not exempt us from the journey; on the contrary it deepens it. The believer doesn't have however to fall into the trap of thinking that from now on, it is only a matter of good will because combat requires that the armor of God is worn. The adversaries, or better the adversary has to be faced, but is defeated only with the weapons that God himself will furnish us.

"The divine gifts which are recalled here are necessary to face an adversary that human force like intelligence, courage etc..., would not be in a position even to approach it. But the Christian participates in a battle that Christ has already won. He has to withstand against powers already dominated by the Risen one; and frequently the good defense is the attack, not to condemn and kill, but to bring the message of the victory of Christ to men" (Rossé). Asceticism (training) is therefore a response to a received gift, in such way that it is not only preserved but continually nourished and improved. We are Christians so as to become Christians; rendered children in Baptism in order to become children. It is necessary to rediscover the urgency of the spiritual combat so as not to be consenting toward oneself and the most problematic aspects of one's own character and temperament.

But the combat is fought according to the rules and the instruments that God himself furnishes us, that is, without falling in the force of will or moralism, and without thinking that a good psychological therapy is sufficient to find a psycho-physical well being, which though is it also important, is not yet the life in the Spirit.

Prayer, nourished and fed by the Word of God, is the effective weapon to withstand the assaults of the enemy, an incessant prayer not to avoid the difficulties that has always accompanied the proclamation of the Gospel, but to remain steadfast in the proclamation of the Gospel amidst trials and persecutions. One prays so that our witnessing may be faithful and coherent, one prays so as to be wise administrators of the gifts of God, confident of His presence and of His help.

### 4. Praying with the Word

1. Am I aware that the new life in Christ is also participation in His battle against the ancient adversary that snares my belonging to Him? Do I recognize the

influence of the evil in my life and in the mission that I have been called to accomplish?

2. How do I welcome “the armor of God”, that is, the gifts He offers me to overcome the enemy, without deluding myself that I can do it with my own strength?
3. Am I convinced that it is not possible to persevere in the proclamation of the Gospel without asceticism, that is without committing myself daily in the spiritual combat against evil?
4. In my life, what is the rapport between the care of the relationship with Christ and the zeal for the pastoral mission? Am I a wise administrator of God’s gifts, confident of His presence and of His help?

I write down the thoughts and sentiments that praying with Word has evoked in me, in order not to forget them and to be able to share with the Sisters.

N.B. What I have lived in prayer and what I have made note I forward it directly to the Superior General, in order to contribute to the preparation of the Seminar on our ministry of pastoral care.

## Sharing with the community

1. We invoke the Holy Spirit
2. Together we reread the text of the meditated Word
3. We share what each has gathered from the personal prayer
4. We pause in silence in order to savour the joy of what each Sister has shared
5. We give thanks for the gift received

If the community wishes to contribute to the reflection on the ministry of pastoral care, a Sister needs to take down notes of the essential elements of what has been shared and then send them to the Circumscription, who will collect the material in view of the Seminar and forward it to the General Government.

*The image of the cover:*

Jesus Good Shepherd with his people (*in detail*)

*Author:* Pjerin Sheldija

*Place:* Church in Krajn - Albania

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