

The Spiritual Battle

Why is it that stories of battle and bravery like the *Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Lord of the Rings* attract us? Perhaps it is because they tell the story of something very *real*: the battle between good and evil that is at the heart of every human experience. And what's more, the characters in these stories show humanity at its greatest in this battle. They show true valor before great evil and the heroic conviction that stands firm even in the face of death itself. A glimpse of this kind of courage kindles in the heart a flame of desire to live that kind of heroism. And for the Christian, this image of *courage in battle* is one of the most eloquent in describing what it means to live life in Christ.

In recent decades, one of the biggest losses we as the Church have suffered is the loss of the sense of the Christian life as a spiritual battle. This is largely due to the widespread denial of the existence of the devil. In the words of the French poet Charles Baudelaire, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he doesn't exist." And yet, for centuries, the Church has always considered herself in a state of battle here on earth, not a battle with human beings, but in the words of St. Paul, a battle "against the power and the principalities and the world rulers of this present darkness" (Eph 6:12). Pope Benedict XVI called our attention to the traditional title of the Church on earth as the Church Militant. He said, "Today the word *ecclesia militans* [Church Militant] is a bit out of fashion, but in reality we can always better understand that which is true... We see how evil wants to rule the world and that it's necessary to enter the struggle against evil. We see how it does this in so many very violent ways, with different forms of violence, but also posing as a force for good while destroying the moral foundations of society." We see the Pope Emeritus echoing here the words of St. Leo the Great, "For the old enemy does not cease to transform himself into an angel of light, and spread everywhere the snares of his deceptions, and make every effort to corrupt the faith of believers."

When we consider this metaphor of spiritual battle correctly, we see how it illumines an important aspect of evangelization. As we work for the conversion of souls back to God and the Church, we must also understand that we are in a real spiritual struggle. The works of human sin and the devil cannot be uprooted without a fight and so it is important that we be "armed" with weapons from the Church's great armory: the sacraments, the Rosary, virtue, prayer, a strong community, and growth in holiness. Let us allow these great stories of battle to inspire us to take up the struggle with courage and joy, knowing that our Victor has already won the battle for us!
~Meghan Cokeley, Office for the New Evangelization, Archdiocese of Philadelphia