

The theme for our morning's meditation is, "Perseverance in prayer." When we think of prayer we normally believe that God would answer us immediately. However, there are many times when we feel that God does not seem to be answering our prayers. We have questions in our mind as to whether God really hears our prayer or not. This morning's passage is to teach us to persevere in prayer and also to be fully equipped through prayer against all the attacks of the evil one. This morning we will be looking at the text from Ephesians.

Paul writing to the Ephesians talks about being strong in the Lord in his mighty power. He uses the imagery of a person putting on the full armour before going to war. Paul reminds us that in the spiritual world we too are in a war against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and against forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Paul brings to mind that real engagement is with cosmic intelligences: Our enemies are not human but demonic.

The forces that are arrayed against us are powerful. They are world rulers of this present darkness. The Greek word *kosmokratores* was used in astrology of the planets which were thought to control the fate of human kind. Not only was this true in the hymns of Zeus, or West Asia but in our country as well. Astrology and the positioning of the planets decide most of the movements of our politicians, cricketers, film-stars and ordinary human beings. The word seems to refer to a worldwide rule as though the powers of evil have complete control of the world. Many a times we feel that way. When Jesus himself was tempted, the devil promised to give him all the kingdoms of the world if only he would worship him. However, we know that on the cross all principalities and powers have been decisively dealt on the cross. Though they still seem to be active the devil and his army are usurpers who have not yet conceded defeat nor have they been destroyed completely. So they continue to exercise considerable power. We are warned not to engage in witchcraft, tantriks and the occult.

These forces are not only powerful but they are also very wicked. The devil and his forces use their power to destroy people. They rejoice in the fall of human beings and are looking out for people whom they can devour. Darkness and wickedness characterize their operations and there has been an outburst of their activity with the appearance of Christ. In the light of this Paul tells us that we must put on the full armour of God.

The devil seldom attacks openly preferring darkness to light, that when he does transform himself into an "Angel of light."(2 Corinthians 11:14) we are caught unsuspecting. Sometimes he roars like a lion and other times he is subtle as a serpent. He therefore prefers to seduce us in compromise and deceive us into error rather than attacking us openly. Force and fraud form his chief offensive against the camp of the saints.

Paul therefore suggests six items of armour which a Christian ought to use against the devil. Firstly, he asks us to put on the belt of truth. Truth here refers to both the truth of Jesus Christ and truth in our inward parts. It is only the truth of Jesus Christ that sets us free from the shackles of sin and bondage to Satan. The disciple of Jesus Christ must always be truthful and honest.

Secondly, he asks us to put on the breast-plate of righteousness. This righteousness comes through our faith in Christ and not by our own merits.

Thirdly, he asks us to put on the shoes that proclaim the Gospel of peace. Witnessing to others and talking about the good news of Jesus Christ is an essential part of enabling us to stand firm in our own faith.

Fourthly, he calls us to put on the shield of faith with which we will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Satan attacks us in different ways and it is our faith that helps us to overcome them.

Fifthly, we are called to put on the helmet of salvation. Our personal salvation is the key way by which we can be sure of standing firm against the evil one.

Finally, we are called to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This armour can be put on through prayer. As we persist in prayer each part of this armour becomes stronger and we will be able to stand firm. May God truly help us to put on the full armour of the God and stand firm against the attacks of the evil one.