



The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: By Their Fruits You Shall Know Them ***Part XII: Engaging to Defend Against the Wolves***



St Francis of Assisi and the Wolf
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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Helen is a lay-Dominican, which is also known as the Order of Preachers, and she, along with her husband Dan, are engaged in youth catechesis and music ministry. Sharon is our token cradle Catholic, and, as everyone by now knows, I am simply here to ask questions, perhaps not the most coherent questions, but they are questions none the less. To help answer those questions is why we have our panel, so welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Discussion:

Last time, we discussed, “What does God ask of us?” Of course, we barely scratched the surface of that iceberg given we only had an hour. The answer to this question is not only a life-long journey, but hopefully an eternal one. I have on my to-do list to work on a series concerning this question, but even that will only give us a small peek at what God desires of us. To truly answer

the question, we must spend time in prayer and study and take advantage of the teachings at Mass. More importantly, we must seek to put our faith in action.

If our faith is words without action, then, there is little purpose to our faith. We make it simply academic; a curiosity, if you will. It is our action which demonstrates we understand what God asks of us. As we speak and present our faith, we should remember the parable of the two sons presented in Matthew 21:28-32.

(Matthew 21:28-32)

[Jesus asked:]²⁸ *“What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’* ²⁹ *He said in reply, ‘I will not,’ but afterwards he changed his mind and went.* ³⁰ *The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go.* ³¹ *Which of the two did his father’s will?”* They answered, *“The first.”* Jesus said to them, *“Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.”* ³² *When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.*

It is true, we cannot buy our way into heaven through our works, because our place in His kingdom was purchased for us by the sacrifice made for us from upon the cross. We are saved by grace as we are told in Ephesians 2:4-10, but we must remember, our works do matter as we are told in James 2:14-26 and Matthew 25:31-46. We must consider, if we profess our obedience on our lips (cf Mark 7:6), but live in disobedience, which do we believe will speak louder when Jesus asks us, “Do you love me?”

“Of course we love you,” we will say, but then, perhaps, we should be prepared for the next question Jesus might ask; “And how might I know?” We should consider what Jesus told us in Mark 7:21-23, where he says:

(Mark 7:21-23)

²¹ *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.* ²² *Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’* ²³ *Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’*

On the surface, the forgiveness offered to us and what God asks of us appears to be relatively simple. To truly understand, though, we must spend time in prayer and study, but we must also endeavor to practice what God teaches as we learn it. The more we understand our faith, the better we may live our faith. More importantly, the better we understand our faith, the more difficult we make the task of the wolves who endeavor to take it from us.

Our discussion today is how we might engage to defend against the wolves. As I have mentioned in previous discussions of this series, our concern is not about whether the left or the right is right or wrong, rather, it is about whether we understand what God asks of us. When I speak about this subject in group settings, I start with the following disclaimer.

My intent is not to offend anyone, rather, to raise awareness of deceptions and tactics designed to influence us and others to support solutions which are contrary to our faith. My intent is not to discuss the merits of politics, rather, the political and ideological tactics threatening our living of the teachings of the Catholic Church and our religious freedom.

My objective is not to dissuade anyone from any political party or candidate, rather, I ask for your engagement from which to influence the cause and solution discussions so that we, the people, yield what is right and just in the eyes of God. It is not about whether Liberals or Conservatives are right or wrong, it is a matter of whether we understand what God asks of us and how we live with that understanding.

Indeed, if we are to defend against the wolves, we must be engaged, for that is the only means we can influence the public conversation and actions. Regardless of the political party or action organizations to which we subscribe, or even if we subscribe to no political party or organization, we must engage as God would have us engage, else, we cede our families and our communities to the wolves.

I ask no one to change their affiliations, rather, to examine them against what God asks of us and engage the conversation such that we may encourage others to problem solving which accomplishes what God asks of us such that deceptions or even good intentions do not generate harmful consequences.

I would like to start by taking a moment to brainstorm. Brainstorming is simply a process where we simply list things, such as courses of action, means, or solutions, for subsequent analysis. As our panelists offer their suggestions, I will capture some of the highlights on our Armor of Faith Radio white board. Just to let our listeners know, a radio white board is just like any other white board, but only I can see it. OK, I'll be honest, I am just using a piece of paper to keep notes.

(Question 1: So, let's take a moment to brainstorm. In what ways can we engage the world around us to defend against deception and to share God's holy truth?)

With all of the deception and disinformation the wolf uses to clothe themselves, one of our first tasks is discerning truth. Our inaugural episode of Armor of Faith Radio was about the belt of truth. That is the first component of the armor of God which is listed in Ephesians 6:14 and it is one of our most important pieces of armor as we engage a world of deception and disinformation.

The application of truth allows us to properly recognize the problems we must address, enables us to properly define the problem, helps us to identify effective solutions, enables us to select the best solution, helps us to implement those solutions, and enables us to evaluate the outcomes from which to determine if we must make adjustments to ensure our solutions solve the problem without adverse consequences. It is key to our analysis necessary for us to do what is right and just in the eyes of God.

(Question 2: So, we start with the really tough question. How are we to sleuth out truth when we are surrounded by so many sources of misinformation, disinformation, and deception?)

Research multiple sources:

- ✓ Look for common facts and threads across sources (watch for circular reporting)
- ✓ Look for reliable/trusted sources of facts and statistics
- ✓ Look for political bias
 - Wording (especially manipulative words and phrases → emotionalism)
 - Funding
 - Leadership
 - Membership
 - Alliances
- ✓ Look for verifiable facts
- ✓ Look for embellishments
- ✓ Look for speculation presented as fact
- ✓ Look for slogans presented as if proven by facts
- ✓ Look for falsehoods presented as facts
- ✓ Look at interpretations which misrepresent verifiable facts
- ✓ Look for original source material/documents (unfiltered)
 - Transcripts
 - Reports
 - Audio/Video
- ✓ Be careful of fact checkers – they have biases too

(Question 3: How we engage in conversation matters. As we engage others, how should we engage them?)

(1 Peter 3:13-17)

13 Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, 16 but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

- ✓ Be civil and polite (while the subject might make us angry, composure is key)
- ✓ Listen (if appropriate, take notes → may help organize thoughts and responses)
- ✓ Remember the importance of credibility → Truth
- ✓ Do not fall to temptation to embellish
- ✓ Avoid name calling → insults do not make arguments, but entrenches positions
- ✓ Be careful with adjectives

- ✓ Ask for reasoned consideration of viewpoint
 - ✓ Support reason with reliable and truthful sources
 - ✓ Seek to engage in reasoned problem solving (must be effective and just)
 - ✓ Objective is not to win an argument, but to preserve the opportunity for another civil conversation and possible partnership
 - ✓ Avoid scriptural references outside of faith communities, but be prepared to present the reason, logic, and justice of scripture
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(Question 4: Writing our representatives gives them feedback as to what we are thinking. **To whom should we write and how should we write?)**

- ✓ Write the first draft, then, scrub it for emotion → remember civility and humility
 - ✓ State the bottom line up front
 - ✓ Be concise – most important information up front
 - ✓ Use reliable sources and facts – cite sources
 - ✓ Present desired outcomes
 - ✓ Present desired solution → explain logic for what is just and cost effective
 - ✓ Consider the audience before using scripture → present the reason, logic, and benefit behind how scripture calls us to action which is right and just
 - ✓ Do not threaten
 - ✓ Ask for their support
 - ✓ Ask for their position
 - ✓ Ask for a response → list specific questions for which an answer is desired
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(Question 5: As we mentioned, engaging political processes and conversations is only a part of engagement. Engaging in ministry provides opportunities as well. **What opportunities does ministry present us?)**

- ✓ Experience versus rhetoric (actions speak louder than words)
 - ✓ Results versus rhetoric (doors opened through helping hands)
 - ✓ Exercises God's call to us to help others
 - ✓ Opportunity to share blessings
 - ✓ Provides an example of how our faith leads us to what is right and just
 - ✓ Caring helps to influence
 - ✓ Bonding opportunity
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(Question 6: If we are to engage and influence action which is right and just, it is critical we know and understand our faith. That is always easier said than done as our study of our faith is a life long journey. **How might we go about building our faith knowledge?)**

- ✓ Attend Mass

- ✓ Spend time in Adoration
 - ✓ Time in prayer
 - ✓ Time with scripture
 - ✓ Time with the Catechism of the Catholic Church
 - ✓ Read the doctors of the church
 - ✓ Read encyclicals
 - ✓ Consider criticisms of the church – research apologetics
 - ✓ Find reliable faith media and references
 - Look for analysis of current events
 - Look for scriptural teaching
 - Do not assume truth just because “Catholic” is in the name
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(Question 7: Sometimes, we struggle in discernment of what is truth as well as what is right and just in the eyes of God. Sometimes we are not certain as to how to respond to the logic of the wolf. If we are uncertain, to whom can we turn?)

(Matthew 10:16-20)

16 “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. 17 But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. 19 When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. 20 For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

(John 14:16-17)

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, 17 the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.

(John 14:26)

26 The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you.

(2 Peter 1:20-21)

20 Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, 21 for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God.

(1 John 5:6)

6 This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth.

Quotes:

From day to day it becomes more and more evident how needful it is that the principles of Christian wisdom should ever be borne in mind, and that the life, the morals, and the institutions of nations should be wholly conformed to them. For, when these principles have been disregarded, evils so vast have accrued that no right-minded man can face the trials of the time being without grave anxiety or consider the future without alarm.

– *Pope Leo the XIII (SAPIENTIAE CHRISTIANAE, On Christians as Citizens)*

But what applies to individual men applies equally to society - domestic alike and civil. Nature did not form society in order that man should seek in it his last end, but in order that in it and through it he should find suitable aids whereby to attain to his own perfection. If, then, a political government strives after external advantages only, and the achievement of a cultured and prosperous life; if, in administering public affairs, it is wont to put God aside, and show no solicitude for the upholding of moral law, it deflects woefully from its right course and from the injunctions of nature; nor should it be accounted as a society or a community of men, but only as the deceitful imitation or appearance of a society.

– *Pope Leo the XIII (SAPIENTIAE CHRISTIANAE, On Christians as Citizens)*

A striking proof of the lessening and weakening of the Christian faith is seen in the insults too often done to the Catholic Church, openly and publicly - insults, indeed, which an age cherishing religion would not have tolerated. For these reasons, an incredible multitude of men is in danger of not achieving salvation; and even nations and empires themselves cannot long remain unharmed, since, when Christian institutions and morality decline, the main foundation of human society goes together with them. Force alone will remain to preserve public tranquility and order. But force is very feeble when the bulwark of religion has been removed, and, being more apt to beget slavery than obedience, it bears within itself the germs of ever-increasing troubles.

– *Pope Leo the XIII (SAPIENTIAE CHRISTIANAE, On Christians as Citizens)*

The very times in which we live are warning us to seek remedies there where alone they are to be found-namely, by re-establishing in the family circle and throughout the whole range of society the doctrines and practices of the Christian religion. In this lies the sole means of freeing us from the ills now weighing us down, of forestalling the dangers now threatening the world. For the accomplishment of this end, venerable brethren, We must bring to bear all the activity and diligence that lie within Our power.

– *Pope Leo the XIII (SAPIENTIAE CHRISTIANAE, On Christians as Citizens)*

Final Thoughts:

As we discussed the question, how can we engage to defend against the wolves, we noted that we, alone, will not solve the problems of the world, but we are part of the tide. By ourselves, we will not influence any change in the political discourse, but if we do not engage, there is one less soul working to accomplish what God asks of us.

People have produced any number of political ideologies. What is right or wrong within any of them is not the purpose of this discussion, it is about what is right and just in the eyes of God. If

we understand our faith, we will be guided by what God asks of us. If we open our hearts in prayer, the Holy Spirit will lead us in how we may engage. Here, we must be careful, for we must truly allow our hearts to be open to the Holy Spirit and not our personal agendas.

The very first step for any of us to act is to decide. We are often tempted to believe that action is useless. That is exactly what the evil one wants us to believe, for if he is successful in making us believe we are helpless or useless, he has taken us out of the fight. To often we are tempted to respond, “But I am too [enter your favorite excuse here].” If we are uncertain as to how we can engage, then, we should ask in prayer. Let us ask God to help us see the gifts and talents over which He has given us stewardship and the purpose to which they may be put so that His will may be done.

The answer may not be immediate. God may not speak to us directly, but if our heart is open and we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, he will point the way. If we are observant, we will sense when He nudges us.

The one thing we must trust, God created us for a purpose. If we do not stand in the way, He will guide us to that purpose. God did not create us to do nothing, but He did give us the gift of freewill so our choices of what we do or choose not to do will have meaning. History books may not write about us, but if we endeavor to do what is right and just, if we seek to do the will of God; heaven will remember and will rejoice.

Wrap Up: Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we begin a new series and turn our attention to the battle for the souls of our children.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: The Battle for Our Children – Part I: What the Bible Tells Us

References:

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