

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

“Prepared”

If you're like me you have a routine that you go through every day to get ready to face the world. Getting up and taking care of all the details – shower, shave and of course the all-important cup of coffee. Depending on the day – that dictates how I dress – you know – long sleeve, short, clergy clothes or regular clothes – suit jacket or not. The ladies know all about dressing for the occasion. Each and every day, we prepare for what we have set aside time to do – knowing who or what we will meet. The more information we know – the more prepared we can be.

This past week I had the privilege of attending the Gulf Atlantic Diocese Clergy Conference in Thomasville, which then led to the 5th Annual Diocesan Synod at the beautiful St. Peter's in Tallahassee. This was a very special time, and I got to visit Holy Trinity in Thomasville, which was an old warehouse that has been marvelously transformed into a beautiful church and parish hall, and then St. Peter's, the Pro-Cathedral of our diocese – which was like stepping into a European cathedral. I have to admit – this was a fabulous time. It was time well spent and for me a reunion of sorts with the clergy of our Diocese and then a chance for me to represent St. Andrew's – before the entire diocese. Armed with the agenda, each of us prepared for the meetings and discussions that had been planned and it also informed us of the expected dress. The ultimate decision was left to each individual – and you certainly did not want to look out of place, or not prepared.

Thursday afternoon we also began an exploration of our new Catechism “To Be a Christian, *An Anglican Catechism*.” This is a carefully prepared document that gives a thorough explanation and description of our faith and beliefs. What made this time really special was that we had the chair of the committee that created this document, the Rev. Dr. Jack Gabig, leading our discussions. It is also important to note that our own bishop, Bishop Neil Lebhar was a member of that team as well, which included noted theologian J.R. Packer. At last we as North American Anglicans have our own catechism! It is all ours and contains a series of questions and answers – with Holy Scripture that gives insight and clarification for each and every point – about what it means to be a Christian.

I don't know if you have ever used or are familiar with the catechism that is in the back of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. While it is also a series of questions and answers – it barely scratches the surface and is made up of only just 17 pages. While it provides answers as to what sin and grace are, it gives absolutely no Scriptural references. Our new “Anglican Catechism” not only tackles the hard questions, beginning with Christ, repentance, faith, and salvation – but gives in depth answers and then the basing scriptural references that would give you a means to go further into the Word and learn more on your own.

So what does this have to do with getting ready each day – or deciding what to wear or to prepare for? I hope that I will be able to shed some light on that before I am finished this morning. We of course dress according to the weather, the people we will meet or the events that we are attending. Just ask a Trojan fan what they wear to a game on a Friday night? This

Friday Night I know that I will be wearing my Trojan hat and shirt, cheering on the team in the first round of the playoffs!

In today's Epistle to the church of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul gives us very strong instructions on how we should dress – spiritually. God wants us to be ready for what lies ahead – and the enemy wants to make it tough for us! Paul instructs us to “*put on the full armor of God.*” When a soldier heads into battle – that soldier needs to be covered properly or their life is in serious danger. He ensures us that we have been given special protective garments – that allow us to withstand anything that the devil wants to throw at us. It is very important to remember that temptation is not a sin! The enemy will always tempt us and try to get us to bite – but God provides what we need to “just say NO!”

Paul says that God gives us “*the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*” The last defensive protection is when he tells us to “*take the helmet of salvation*” so that we can be protected in mind, body and spirit. All of these - the belt, the breastplate, shoes for our feet, the shield of faith and the helmet are carefully crafted by the creator and redeemer, but how can we go on the offensive to tell the devil to stop? That is why we have been given the greatest weapon of all - it is for defense and offense – the “*sword of the Spirit*” which is the Word of God.

The Word of God is the greatest means by which to fight the “father of lies” because the Word is the Truth. Just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light – lies cannot exist or flourish anywhere near the truth. On the night before Jesus, the Living Word of God went to the cross – He told His disciples that “*He was going to prepare a place for them*” Thomas then said that they did not know the way! Jesus responded to them that “*I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.*” (John 14:6) To me the evidence is clear – and that is that when we pray – we ask the Holy Spirit to not only defend us by the Word of God – the Sword – but to put the enemy on the run – because He cannot win in the presence of Truth. He tempted Jesus in the wilderness, (Matthew 4:1-11) but Jesus did not sin – when we are tempted we call upon the Holy Spirit, in Word and Truth to help us to reject Satan.

Ok – but what does this have to do with the catechism? It has to do with preparation! Please think of a job or hobby that you are involved with or that you might be passionate about – the more you know about it – the more prepared you are to do it well. For example playing guitar – I have been playing guitar since I was 13 years old, or any musical instrument – to be doing it well is something that takes work and practice – lots of practice! Just ask Gray or Anne, or anyone who plays an instrument. The old saying “use it or you lose it” is certainly true – and if you don't keep your skills sharp or even more advanced by practicing – then those skills will most certainly erode, if not lessen. How about a foreign language? Unless you practice it and use it – it becomes only a phrase here or there that you remember or can use. When we took our daughter Theresa to Kennedy airport for her and Essey to return to Germany, she asked me

to help a woman who only spoke Spanish. Theresa speaks Spanish fluently, but asked me to help. I took 3 years of High School Spanish and am certainly NOT proficient by any means. The problem arises when you say a phrase or two to a person in Spanish and they hear it and then start to speak in a flurry of words that go by so fast that there is no way you can keep up, let alone understand every 5th or 6th word. Of course, if you throw in the word for “slowly” which is “despacio” that might be helpful – but it is better to just be truthful and confess that you “no habla Español!”

It is the same thing with the faith – it is much better to tell someone you don’t know and you will get them the answer to their question – than to try and “fake” your way through or worse give someone the wrong answer. That is where this new catechism comes in. It is a tool for sharpening the knowledge of our faith and hopefully to deepen our passion to share our faith. The questions and answers are exactly what will help the most, and even the Scripture references. The more I read it – the more I like it – because it is easy to use and not at all like a high tech reference document that seems like it is written in another language. This is clear and straightforward!

Think about something that excites you; don’t you like to share that with friends? We have someone here today who loves to spend a lot of time in tree stands – or another person who takes pictures of geese flying or in the field and then shares the pictures on Facebook. It is the same thing with our faith – we should be so excited about what we know and believe – about WHO we know and believe in – that we want to share. Look into getting a copy for yourself so that you can learn and share. You can look at this one after the service today and will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

- We always hear the phrase “share the Gospel.” Do you know exactly what that means?
- What does it mean to really repent?
- What does it mean to truly be saved?
- How are the Old and the New Testaments related to each other? (Besides running together after Malachi!)
- Do you know how many books there are in the Bible (66)? In the Old Testament (39) or the New Testament (27)? What about the additional 15 books called the Apocrypha that the Roman Catholics consider part of their Bible?
- Why did Jesus suffer?
(all of these are in our new Catechism)

I strongly recommend this book, which I will be using as a part of our Confirmation instruction here at St. Andrew’s and will be referring to from time to time during my teaching and preaching. We have been waiting a long time for this, and I am very excited! We are blessed to have something that we can use each day, along with the Full Armor of God (not to replace the Bible, but to work alongside) – to help us through the day – informed and prepared.