

## The Full but Neglected Backpack

By Steve Ray

### The Story

As soon as the traveler crested the hill he knew he was in dire straits. He was lost and desperately weary from hours of trudging down dusty paths and his tongue was swollen with thirst. The leather pack his mother had placed on his back grew heavier by the mile. He was no where near his destination. Desperation drove him close to panic. To make matters worse an ominous scoundrel was lurking on the side of the path. Their eyes met and the villain lurched forward. In terror the traveler shrieked, dropped his pack to the ground, and clenched his fists. The villain, undeterred by the traveler's shriek of fear and lame attempt at self-defense, charged with his dagger raised high. With one thrust of the rusty knife the defenseless traveler lay bleeding on the ground.

Hunters in the brush nearby heard the shriek of fear and came dashing down the hillside, crashing through the underbrush. The thief had barely enough time to rummage through the pockets of the fallen man before escaping down the ravine. The hunters arrived too late—the man was dead. They searched through his pack to see if they could discover his identity. They stopped in utter amazement, looking first at the weary traveler than back to the contents of the backpack. His mother had provided him a map and compass, food and water, and most importantly, a gleaming sword of exquisite design. The pilgrim's mother had provided everything necessary for the pilgrim's journey; why pray tell, had he not used them the provisions? Was it possible he was not aware of the backpack's contents?

St. Peter addresses Christians in the world as "aliens and strangers" (1 Pet 2:11), and St. Paul tells us we are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). We are sojourners in a land fraught with danger. The word *parish* comes from the Greek word for *sojourner* or *stranger*. We are strangers traveling through a strange land and our holy Mother Church has provided us, by the grace of God, with all that is needed for the journey. Our backpack is full of provisions: miraculous bread, the water of life, clean garments, impenetrable armor, a map, compass, and instructions. Holy Mother Church has provided the pilgrims traveling to the Celestial City a gleaming sword, the word of God. No need to fall prey to a poorly wielded and rusty knife when we have a jeweled sword worthy of a king.

Catholics too frequently leave the Good Book on the shelf as a gilded decoration. What did Jesus do when the villain and *god of this world* accosted Him in the wilderness, as he so accosts? Did Jesus drop His backpack and run? No. Jesus knew its contents and quickly drew His sword, the Scriptures, and with great precision laid bare the lies.

Too many rush out to join the latest fad or the newest apparition. This is not necessarily a bad thing. But should we leave what we *know* is God's inspired word unread on the shelf to run off in search of that which is *uncertain*. Are Catholics afraid of misinterpreting the Bible but not afraid of believing every seemingly supernatural or even secular voice? We face enemies from every quarter: Satan and his minions (1 Pet 5:8), sin (Gen 4:7), the world and its materialism (1 Jn 2:15–17), our own self-love (Mk 8:35) and a host of

others (Mt 13:3–9). We are even waylaid by enemies outwardly appearing to be Christians but are actually wolves in sheep’s clothing (Mt 7:15).

Let’s stop on the path and take inventory! Where are we going? What has our Mother provided to sustain us on our journey? Have we exerted the time and energy to learn good swordsmanship? Do we know our enemies? Have we joined a good Catholic Bible Study or sought help and resources to study it on our own? Have we appropriated the tremendous defenses that have been so freely given? Unhappily, too many Catholics are dropping to the left and right (no pun intended) simply because they have neglected the magnificent gifts of God.

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### **The Investigation**

What two components make up the Word of God (2 Thess 2:15; CCC 80–82)? In what kind of warfare are we engaged (2 Cor 10: 3–4)? What has God provided for the inevitable warfare (Eph 6:10–18; Rom 13:12)? What is the Word of God likened to (Heb 4:12; Eph 6:17)? How did King David describe the Scriptures (Psa 19:7–11)? What do the Scriptures give us (2 Tim 3:15)? Where do the Scriptures come from and what are they profitable for (2 Tim 3:16–17; CCC 105)? Why should the Catholic be immersed in the Bible (Rom 15:4; 16:25; CCC 131, 133)? What is the sure word of God (CCC 67)?

What benefits are realized from the study of Scripture (1 Pet 2:2; Psa 119:105; CCC 141)? Can God’s Word be trusted (Mt 5:17–19; 24:35; CCC 215)? What is Truth (Psa 119:160; Jn 17:17; CCC 2246)? When Jesus was tempted by the devil, what weapon did he wield (Mt 4:1–11)? What is our nourishment and defense along our journey (CCC 141; 2835)? How is one sustained and comforted by the Father in this land fraught with dangers (CCC 104)? How were our forebears, the Jews, to live and instruct their sojourning families (Deut 6:4–7)?

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### **The Witnesses**

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215)

“The trumpet of Christ is His Gospel. He hath blown it, and we have heard. ‘Let us array ourselves in the armor of peace...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,’ let us sharpen. So the apostle in the spirit of peace commands. These are our invulnerable weapons: armed with these, let us face the evil one; ‘the fiery darts of the evil one’ let us quench with the sword-points dipped in water, that, have been baptized by the Word, returning grateful thanks for the benefits we have received, and honoring God through the Divine Word” (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, 11).

Pope John XXIII

“Following the counsel of St. Paul in regard to the attitude to be taken towards the evil spirits in an order higher than ours, we should note the interesting description he makes of the good fighter poised to meet the assault of his adversary. ‘Stand fast, your loins girt with truth...take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fire-tipped arrows of your wicked enemy; make the helmet of salvation your own, and the

sword of the spirit, God's word.' All these are spiritual weapons described in figures of speech by means of which, beloved brethren and children, you can discern indications of what can be and what ought to be the attitude of a good Christian in the face of any event, at any time and under any circumstances. That which comes from the Evil One and from unbridled natural inclinations is a war of the spirit—a continuous warfare—and always the hideous fire that can penetrate and destroy everything” (Pope John XXIII, *Message of Peace*, September 8, 1961).