



*The Battle of Lepanto by Lucas Valdez, c. 17th century*

**A**s Catholics, we live lives of spiritual combat. While most might imagine the spiritual combat to be easier or safer than physical combat, in fact it is far more terrifying and dangerous. Physical combat merely kills the body; the spiritual can kill the soul.

St Paul wrote to the Ephesians about God's powerful aids to us in this combat: spiritual armor and arms. The armor of God, which consists of the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, equipment of the Gospel of Peace, shield of faith, and helmet of salvation and empowers us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might; enabling us to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:10-18). We are also given an offensive weapon: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. These arms and armor enable us to fight on the spiritual level with great effectiveness.

Such combat includes fighting to defend against, convert

and save those who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Phil 3:18-19). St. Matthew's gospel reminds us that spiritual combat also includes standing firm against false Christs (that is, anti-Christes, such as Communism) and false prophets (such as Mohammad; as Hilaire Belloc pointed out, Islam is in reality just a Christian heresy).

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We might say that Holy Rosary Sunday is a celebration of the holy sword of the Spirit. Originally known as the Feast of Our Lady of

Victory and, later, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, it was established to commemorate the decisive victory of the Christian fleet on October 7th, 1571 over the more powerful Muslim fleet at the Battle of Lepanto.

In 1571, Pope St Pius V was one of the few in Europe who clearly saw the danger as Turkish troops moved relentlessly westward. He strove to unify the powers of Europe against an enemy that none could withstand alone. With some notable exceptions in Church history, most Popes are men of intelligence, spiritual discernment and holy wisdom, and see clearly the reality of the natural and spiritual worlds of

their time. St Pius V was such a pope.

However, he faced a major problem: Europe was undergoing one of its “recurring periods of division and disease” as G.K. Chesterton put it. Internal divisions between Catholics; the spreading Protestant revolt; petty leaders maneuvering for short term political or commercial gain while oblivious to the Islamic tsunami that was about to crash down upon them.

Eventually, St Pius was able to establish the Holy League. Yet only the Papal States, Spain, Venice and some other Italian states joined it — the rest of Europe seemingly couldn’t be bothered to defend itself — and a combined fleet was painstakingly assembled.

While the European fleet was significantly smaller than the Turkish fleet, its ships were better built, its sailors had armor and were better disciplined. Besides, new technology in the form of cannons mounted on the sides of some of the ships would revolutionize naval warfare.

The Pope’s main weapon, however, was the Rosary. For this was first and foremost a *spiritual combat*; the naval battle was merely a physical manifestation of it. Every man in the Holy League’s fleet had a Rosary, and begged the Blessed Virgin Mary for victory. Their prayers were united with those of countless Christians throughout Europe who were also praying the Rosary at the Pope’s request.

The Holy League’s flagship also carried a copy of the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which had been touched to the original, and recently sent to the King of Spain by the Archbishop of Mexico, specifically as a supernatural help for the battle.

The fleets met off the Gulf of Corinth near Greece in one of the largest and most consequential naval battles in history. At the hour of the Christian victory, and this fact is well attested, the Pope was talking to some cardinals in Rome. He abruptly stopped, opened a window and looked heavenward. He then turned to the cardinals and said: “It is not now a time to talk any more upon business; but to give thanks to God for the victory he has granted to the arms of the Christians.”

So, having been supernaturally informed of the victory, Pope St Pius V gave us the feast of Holy Rosary Sunday. This is why the month of October is dedicated to the Rosary — which, after the Eucharist, is the most celestial form of prayer; an offering to God made fragrant with the words of St. Elizabeth, the Archangel Gabriel, and Christ himself.

Such is the sublime beauty and strength of this spiritual sword.

The Christian victory broke the momentum of the seemingly unstoppable Islamic expansion, and prevented Islam from breaking out into the Atlantic Ocean and reaching the shores of the newly discovered Americas. It also gives the ages an example of the great power of the Rosary when prayed devoutly.

Fast forward to Nigeria in 2014, when Boko Haram, a Muslim group infamous for their terrorism, decapitations and the burning alive of non-Muslims, kidnapped over 200 Christian school girls. Some months later, while a local Catholic bishop was praying his Rosary, Jesus appeared before him and offered him a sword. As the bishop took it, the sword was transformed into a Rosary.

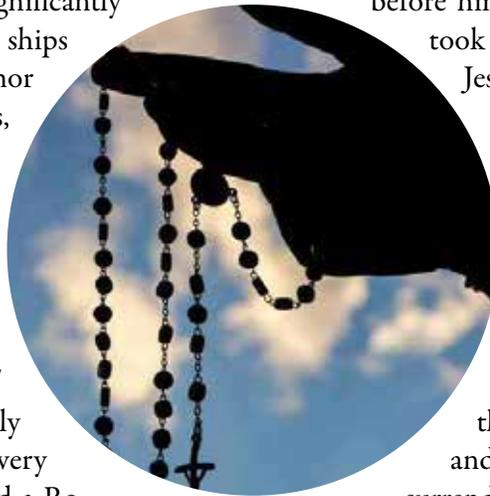
Jesus then looked at him and said three times: “Boko Haram is gone! Boko Haram is gone! Boko Haram is gone!”

The Bishop said: “I didn’t need any prophet to give me the explanation. It was clear that with the Rosary we would be able to expel Boko Haram.” He began promoting the Rosary throughout his diocese. Eventually and unexpectedly, many of the girls, escaped, were rescued or released, and 700 members of Boko Haram ended up surrendering their weapons and themselves to Nigerian authorities.

Our Church, nation and civilization are now threatened not only by the heretical forces that fought the Christians at Lepanto — the Christian heresy of Islam and its false prophet — but also by the more subtle forces of atheism, euphemistically called “secularism.” Such forces have wormed themselves into our civil institutions and our Church. We appear to be at a major turning point in history. But, as Pope St John Paul II said, “Be not afraid!”

Don Juan, the charismatic leader of the Holy League fleet, the quintessential happy warrior, called out to his men before the Battle of Lepanto: “You have come to fight the battle of the Cross — to conquer or to die. But whether you die or conquer, do your duty this day, and you will secure a glorious immortality.” We too must fight the battle of the Cross in our own day and in our own way.

We have been given the arms and armor to do so. The Epistle to the Ephesians describes our spiritual armor. Our Lord and Our Lady have given us a sword of the Spirit in the Rosary. So let us daily wield this sword in the spiritual combat that rages around us, and joyfully do our part in assisting Our Lady in the conversion and salvation of souls, and in the crushing, once and for all, of the serpent’s head. ✠



# The Glorious Cross in Our Lives

With the feast of the Holy Cross on September 14th, we began the last season of our liturgical year. Hence, it is worth reflecting on the glorious cross of Christ.

There are 2 sides to every cross: a front and a back. The front side is what everyone sees. There, our Lord hangs in terrible pain and loneliness. This is the side that we see when we or people around us suffer. You don't need faith to see this side of the cross.

However, there is also a *back side* of the cross. Like the dark side of the moon, this side is unseen by earthly eyes. eyes of faith alone can fly so high. Only by faith do we know that the cross can actually be something *good*. By faith we see our Lord's cross in its glory; we see it as the instrument of our redemption and its victory over sin and death. We also see our own crosses as means to sharing in that victory. This is the side that the Church invites us to reflect on during this season.

St Paul wrote to the Romans that, "If we have died with Christ we shall also live with Him" (6:8). God custom makes each of our crosses according to our personalities, temperaments, background and even the degree of glory that we were created to enjoy. It is faith in His infinite goodness and wisdom that helps us to accept the crosses in our lives as means to

glory and to respond with trust, praise and gratitude.

In his book, *Consoling the Heart of Jesus*, Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, points out that trusting God finds its concrete form in a life of praise and gratitude. To help us understand this, he gives an example of a loving father whose child needs a serious operation in order to live. The father is well aware that this operation will cause his child much suffering, but, without it, the child would suffer even more and maybe die. Now, whatever pain the father endures in seeing his child suffer this is made worse if that child should kick and scream the whole way to the hospital, cursing his father and telling him that he doesn't believe that he loves or cares about him.

It is something like that with us and God. We are the sick children who need to be healed of our selfishness and He knows that the cure is not pleasant. However, our trust in Him actually makes it easier on us and finds expression in our praise and gratitude for *all* that He sends us. This is most pleasing to our Heavenly Father's heart.

So as we go through the Season of the Holy Cross, may we keep before our eyes Christ's Victorious Cross, remembering that, like His, our crosses also have "back side" which will only be fully understood in eternity. ✠

