

## We Are Battling Satan

Dear friends in Christ,

This weekend marks a very famous anniversary. One of the most important battles in all history took place 950 years ago. The Battle of Hastings was the last time England was invaded. The English actually faced invaders at two ends of their land—some from Scotland to the north, and the others coming across the English Channel from Normandy, what we call France. King Harold of the Anglo-Saxons, that is, the English, marched 6000 troops 250 miles southward. The Normans, led by their King, William, known as William the Conqueror, came across the channel in boats, then headed north. They met outside the town of Hastings, in October, 1066.

The Anglo-Saxons seemed to have the advantage. They were positioned on top of a hill. Wars then were fought with siege walls: soldiers used their shields, which were really more like wooden or metal doors, to form a solid wall, with the men kneeling behind them. The enemy could try to attack, but they couldn't break through a good siege wall. Since this was England, the English could just wait out the French attack.

Normally the battles began with the archers, shooting their arrows over the wall. Since the French were down below, their archers just shot their arrows over the English soldiers' heads, for little good. Now, usually both sides shot their arrows, and after their barrage, they would pick up the other army's arrows and shoot them back. But the English didn't have archers. The French shot their arrows, and then...they were out of ammunition. What do they do? So the French started running up to attack the wall—only to be hacked at by the English soldiers, reaching over the wall. The Frenchmen ran away. It looked like it would be an English victory. But that's not how the battle went, because the English got caught up in their pride.

We are in a battle. It is a spiritual battle against the devil. He'd like nothing more than to destroy our faith and lead us to hell. And sometimes our pride misleads us. We see that in our Gospel today, as Jesus' disciples are filled with pride. But Jesus saved them and saved us, by his humility. May we be strengthened by Jesus' words as we battle Satan.

Our Gospel account does seem amazing. Jesus has been going around Israel, healing individuals, feeding crowds, driving out demons and raising the dead even. Mark tells us that **“the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.”** When you see God's power at work, fear and awe are natural responses. We can feel that way when we visit a beautiful mountain or canyon—the majesty of nature makes us reflect on the power of God who made this earth. When a furious storm arises, we may feel afraid, until we recall God's loving promise that he is with us always, and then our fear turns to awe at the power that is around us.

Jesus then described the greatest reason for awe. He said that when they got to Jerusalem, he would be handed over to the leaders of their land, who would condemn him and then mock

him and kill him. But on the third day he would rise from death. He would rise—meaning they would rise from death too. What a great victory Jesus was promising them.

But how did Jesus' disciples respond? They got all proud. James and John came to Jesus and asked, **“Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory.”** Now, Jesus has just said that he would rise from the dead; and they correctly understood that this meant they would rise, too. They would join Jesus in his glorious reign over all creation.

But that wasn't enough for them. They wanted more! The victory Jesus promised didn't sound good enough. No, they wanted the seats of honor. It is interesting, James and John are often mentioned as being with Jesus more than the other disciples—for example, at his Transfiguration; their only competition for being the closest would have been Peter. Maybe they were worried that Peter would get a better spot than they would. Maybe they were worried about the others, like Andrew or Jude, stepping up and taking their place. Perhaps they thought they were better than others; their pride got the best of them.

And in their pride, they disobeyed God. Jesus had earlier taught them, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Another time Jesus had said that when you get to a banquet, you should take the lowest seat, and wait for the host to call you up. The life of a Christian is to be one of humble service.

I recall a woman who exemplified that. She was always willing to do the cleaning up—cleaning the house, cooking and then cleaning up after meals, even though she had other work; and she never complained about this work. It was a joy for her to serve others constantly. And when it came to the meals, she would not even expect to sit down: she had to be told to sit and eat. She did this because she loved serving others. And you know, we Christians all feel that way at times. We may not have the time or energy or talent to serve a meal; but it is a joy to be able to help others by giving a helping hand or supporting a charity. Humble service is fun.

But there are other times when we get more worried about our status. We look around us at what others have. We might even start to feel insecure. And pretty soon we're acting selfishly. I want the best position, I want some of the glory which I deserve. And not only are we ignoring the needs of others, we're ignoring God's command to lovingly serve others. Our pride misleads us; and next thing we know, we're losing the battle with Satan.

950 years ago at Hastings, the English thought things were going good. And if they had just held their siege wall, they probably would have won the battle. But when they saw the French retreating, some of the English soldiers decided to chase after them. They left the secure wall and ran down the hill—only to be killed by the French at the bottom. This happened a couple times. And then the Norman French king, William, figured this might be a good strategy.

William sent his troops to start to attack the siege wall but then run away, luring more and more English soldiers to chase after them—and get killed. After a while, the English were running out of replacement soldiers. The battle was turning. Finally their king, King Harold, was killed; and the troops scattered. For the English, their pride misled them.

As we battle Satan, our pride would lead us to certain ruin. But our king did something amazing. King Jesus stepped into the battle for us. And Jesus' humility saved us.

Our First Lesson today (Isaiah 53:10-12) prophesied it. This chapter, written 700 years before Jesus came to earth, tells us that Jesus would be humbled, beaten, and finally killed. Jesus would know full well what was going to happen to him—again, look at our Gospel, where Jesus spells out exactly what he would face. Isaiah tells us that “It was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.” Yes, God the Father had laid out the plan for Jesus to be betrayed and crucified. This was so that Jesus would be “an offering for sin.” “He bore the sin of many.”

In our Gospel, Jesus summed it up this way: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Talk about love! Jesus didn’t just sit down to make us a nice meal. Jesus’ didn’t just come to wash our feet or do some other lowly service. Jesus came to pay the price for our sins.

When Satan tempts us, we so often take the bait, like soldiers abandoning their post to go chase after their own glory. But Jesus paid the full price for every mean word you’ve spoken, every time you ignored the feelings of others as you followed your own plans, every time you’ve made excuses for your behavior. Every sin is laid on Jesus. And he paid the price. In full.

This changes our lives. Jesus told his disciples, **“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”** And that is how we can lead our lives, because we have been changed completely by Jesus. He washed away all of our sins. Now you, the real you, wants to serve Jesus and serve others in every way you can. Your life is different from this world.

You know, the Battle of Hastings changed so much about our lives. The Norman King William brought stability to England; a working government and security forces were established. The Norman French also brought different dress, and different food, and more peaceful customs. The Norman Conquest also changed the language. Did you know that English has twice as many words as Spanish? A major reason is that Battle of Hastings. Many French words were added to the English language. This is why we often have two words for things: You can “eat,” an Anglo-Saxon word, or you can “dine,” from the French. We not only have words for cows, sheep and pigs, we have words for the meat of those animals: “beef,” “mutton” and “pork.” Sometimes the French words sound a little snooty: you can “meet” a person, the Anglo-Saxon word, or you can “encounter” someone, the French word. So, kids, if you wonder why you have so many words you have to learn in spelling class, you can blame it on the Battle of Hastings, 950 years ago.

As Christians, our lives were changed when our King, Jesus, won our salvation. We don’t want to act like the sinful world. We don’t need to get angry; we have peace in our hearts, even in times of danger, because we know God is on our side. And our conversation has been changed; we don’t use the bad language or derogatory words that our sinful world does; instead, we work to encourage those around us, and we speak well of others. We want to serve, just as Jesus came to serve us.

But it isn't easy. We are Battling Satan. And our pride misleads us. But then we recall how Jesus' humility saved us. May God fill you with faith in Jesus, so that you can reflect his loving words and actions in all that you say and do. Amen.