STAND FIRM

The Armor of God

Father Robert Gillelan | October 29, 2026

In that first reading, St. Paul is not just proclaiming pious platitudes to the Ephesians; he's really speaking about the practicality of their faith.

It cannot be a luxury. It cannot be an accessory. It's their survival kit.

So, given the problems that the Ephesians are facing, they're to put on the armor of God, grab their shield, and stand firm in the faith.

And so, what are the issues that are facing the Ephesians? Well, I think you'll see that they are very much similar to the problems that we face today in our world and in our culture.

First of all, in Ephesus, there were these entrenched occult practices. Ephesus was called the epicenter of magic and sorcery and all kinds of occult practices in the ancient Mediterranean world. With the approach of Halloween our exorcists tell us that we will see an increase in occult practices in our society. And even without Halloween, people have given themselves over, knowingly and unknowingly, to the occult.

Another issue for the Ephesians was pagan idolatry. In Ephesus—if you ever go there—I think there are the remains of the Temple of Artemis, also known as Diana, and it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

As you remember, there's another passage in Ephesians regarding Paul condemning the worship of Artemis. That affected the silversmiths because they made these talismans of Artemis that people would buy.

And so, by condemning their pagan worship, he was telling people, "Don't buy these idols." So he's dealing with pagan idolatry as well.

And then there was the deception of false teaching. Ephesus was very multicultural, and all kinds of wandering philosophers and teachers who were false teachers, and even early Christian heretics like the Gnostics, would pass through and preach their ideologies. Paul is saying, you have to be on guard against these false teachings.

If all of that were not enough, Ephesus was incredibly culturally diverse. And regarding Christianity, it was a mix of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. If you've ever worked with the OCIA, you know that bringing people into the faith from various backgrounds, with their expectations and their own practices, their own set of beliefs, can be very challenging at times.

So St. Paul is noticing all of these things that are proving problematic for this early Christian community in Ephesus.

In one form or another, I leave it to your imaginations to consider how those sorts of challenges are also with us today.

And so Paul is simply saying to those early Christians, "Lock your arms, put on the spiritual armor of Christ, and refuse to surrender the ground that you've already won in Christ Jesus."

He's not telling them to go on the offensive. He's telling them to be defensive, to stand firm in their faith.

Or, to put it a little bit differently, from Flannery O'Connor, a great Catholic American author: "We must learn to push back against the present age as hard as it pushes against us."