

Dear St. Peter's it is so, so good to be back! I feel like a son coming back for his mom's vietnamese home cooking, the music, the ambience, the ambo, the people...this was my home.

My journey in the priesthood has been so amazing. Okotoks has been so good to me. Down there they call me the 18 year old korean pastor...of which I am neither. I am a bit of an enigma to people there. I've also got a chance to ride a horse like a real Albertan. It was actually super safe and it was like driving a car. I was so good at it they call me the Vietnamese John Wayne!

But as I reflect upon my time at St. Peter's, I am grateful for so many things. St. Peter's was a kind of Nazareth, my spiritual training ground, a place of preparation. But I realized that I cannot be at Nazareth forever. The time will come--and it has--when I have to go to Jerusalem, when I have to take up my cross and lay down my life for the people. Boot camp is over. The battle is here. It is time to rally the troops because the king is coming!

Let me be clear: my battle here is not with any human being. No, no our battle is not against "flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places." We must remember this. When we begin fighting with each other then the enemy has succeeded in starting friendly fire among our own.

So my battle is for hearts, firstly for my own. The enemy is sly. Please continue to pray for me, to pray for all priests; for to make a priest fall is to make thousands fall. Secondly, there is a battle for your hearts, the hearts of my people, the hearts of God's people.

This is the battle that Ahaz faced but he thought that the battle was OUTSIDE of him. What he didn't realize was that the battle was much, much closer... You see, King Ahaz was the king of Jerusalem and two kingdoms in the north were plotting to attack Jerusalem for not joining their alliance against Assyria.

So imagine that Calgary is like Jerusalem and Red Deer wanted Calgary to join their war on Toronto because they were tired of paying taxes and unfair equalization payments. But Calgary did not want to join the alliance because Toronto is just too strong. So Red Deer got angry and teamed up with Edmonton to attack Calgary.

In the same way, when King Ahaz of Jerusalem heard that Northern Israel had allied with Syria, he and the whole nation were terrified. So King Ahaz was tempted to take matters into his own hands through political alliances and maneuvering.

But this is when Isaiah steps in. He basically says to King Ahaz: trust in God, stand firm in faith or you will not stand firm at all. This was the real battle, the battle for his heart. So then Isaiah says in our first reading, look if you don't believe me, ask for ANY sign, be it as high as heaven or as deep as Sheol (the land of the dead). God will give you a sign to prove to you that he is faithful.

How does King Ahaz respond? No, no I won't put the Lord to the test. Basically, he will not ask for a sign because if he receives a sign he will HAVE to trust in God and that is a lot harder than trusting in himself, in being in control; it is a lot harder than putting things into his own hands because absolutely trusting in God requires that we let go.

This is the primordial battle that we all have to face. This is the battle between trust and fear. The battle between entrusting our lives completely to God or grasping at political alliances, MERELY human endeavors to control our situation. This is a battle between seeing God as Father or Tyrant, Deliverer or Dictator.

But as Christians we cannot live in fear. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that Christians must be distinguished by absolute trust in the Heavenly Father. Absolute trust. And we can have this absolute trust because although the battle rages on the war is already won...

When it was finally announced that WWII was officially over on August 14th 1945, the Americans erupted in a roar that lasted for 20 minutes! Loud jubilation filled the streets of America and all over the world as they heard the message of GOOD NEWS.

Interestingly one man did not get the memo. A Japanese Lieutenant, Mr. Hiroo Onoda was on a mission in the field in the Philippines when Japan had surrendered but he did not know. Even after the pamphlets were rained from the sky several times, he thought it was propaganda or forgeries, and he still did not believe the war was over. He went to live in hiding and fighting in the Philippines for 29 years after WWII had ended. 29 years!!! That is, until a fellow Japanese man went out in search of him and told him. This man was looking for "Lieutenant Onoda, a [panda](#), and the [Abominable Snowman](#), in that order."

Do you live in FEAR as if the war is not over or do you live with ABSOLUTE TRUST because YOU KNOW the victory has been achieved? When St. Paul talks about being an Apostle set apart for the Gospel/Good News of God he used that term specifically. Gospel/Good News had its roots in Jewish and Roman customs that whenever a war had ended or an enemy had been defeated they would send a messenger who had the euangelion which is greek for GOOD NEWS/GOSPEL.

So when Mark begins his Gospel (speaking to a Roman/Jewish audience), how does he depict Jesus beginning his ministry? "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the GOSPEL" (Mk 1:15). Jesus had come to announce his impending victory and indeed the victory has already been achieved, the war is over!

The Cross is our standard/flag, it is the sign that is as high as heaven and as deep as Sheol because by the blood of the cross and his resurrection from the dead he has freed the captives from the land of the dead to ascend into the highest heavens!

The Cross is a reminder to us that absolute trust in the Father ALWAYS...WINS. ALWAYS. No matter if you are mocked, beaten, ridiculed, scourged, tortured, crucified and even put to death, we know that absolute trust in our heavenly Father always wins and his Son's resurrection from the dead is our guarantee of that.

The war against sin and death and the enemy is done! Now is the time to rally the troops. Now is the time to be messengers of the Gospel, to proclaim to our darkened world that the war is over! Yes the battle may continue but the war is done. It is now our duty to convince those who don't believe that the war is over, those who are like Hiroo Onada trapped in the prison of fear and doubt.

But we ourselves must be witnesses to this victory in our lives. We must live lives of absolute trust. Catholics, for far too long we have settled being Catholics by name or just on Sunday. It is time to rally the troops and the battle for your heart must begin because we must begin to live lives of absolute trust that is infused into every moment of our lives, of our days, of our choices. Jesus cannot just be a part of our life on the side anymore; when he comes he will ask for your entire heart, he is asking you to put him in the center of your life. Will you be ready?

Even Jesus himself warns us: It is not those who say Lord Lord who will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. It is not

those who just proclaim our Lord on their lips, but those who proclaim him with their lives, who take up their cross daily and follow him in absolute trust. This will assure us of our salvation, of our place among his army!

As we anticipate and prepare for our Lord's first coming in history, let us be reminded of his return as king in his second coming in glory. The battle is on. It is time to rally the troops because the king is coming. So when HE comes, where will you stand?