

St. Patrick's Breastplate UNPACKED



[Fr. Patrick Briscoe, OP](#) - published on 03/16/21

Take a moment to pray and reflect on these ancient, powerful words.

St. Patrick's Breastplate (also called the Lorica, from the Latin word for Roman armor) is a prayer to take up arms in spiritual battle. Summoning the forces of heaven to combat the armies of hell, this prayer attributed to the Apostle of Ireland contains a wealth of theological wisdom. On the feast of St. Patrick, take a moment to pray and reflect on these ancient, powerful words.

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness

of the Creator of creation.

St. Patrick's prayer starts with the central mystery of the Christian faith: the Holy Trinity. The Christian God is one in three, three in one. The eternal Father begets the Son, and together they breathe forth the Holy Spirit. **Eternal and infinite, the love of Father, Son, and Spirit pours forth upon the world.** The diffused goodness of God, a goodness so great that it cannot be contained, spills out upon all creation, making and forming the world in love.

I arise today

*Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.*

Against the threats of the fallen world, against the powers of darkness and sin, the mysteries of the life, suffering, and resurrection of Christ stand as the source of our hope. **Recalling these mighty works of God invites the graces of Christ's victory over death into the present moment.** No mere psychological affirmation, contemplating these mysteries binds us to Christ's triumph giving us strength in the here and now.

I arise today

*Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.*

Isolation is a great cause of spiritual sadness. Patrick, who had been enslaved and tended sheep alone on a mountain for six years, knew how to call upon the hosts of heaven for inspiration and consolation. **No Christian is ever alone.** We have our guardian angels, the saints in heaven, and the support of God's holy people at our side. Naming the ranks and choirs of intercessors,

recognizing those we have near to us always, helps us fight the feeling of being forsaken or abandoned.

*I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.*

For so many the wonders of the natural world speak clearly of the awesome power of God. These lines may call to mind similar songs of creation, in Scripture or perhaps [the prayer by St. Francis](#). **Here in this prayer we declare that nothing, not power of earth or hell, is as strong as the God who made all that is.** Creation speaks to us of God's total mastery of all that is.

*I arise today, through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.*

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit, given at Baptism and renewed at Confirmation, direct and animate our Christian lives. **We may be tempted to believe that we are left to our own devices to defend or announce our faith. But nothing could be further from the truth!** The Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts, will advise us, providing direction even in the quotidian.

I summon today

*All these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.*

Forces of evil are at work in our world. **We should not hesitate to condemn, as the Breastplate does, those evils that allure and deceive.** Perhaps we simply put too much stock in a horoscope, play with tarot cards, or seek a psychic reading. Even these solicitations can open a soul to the wiles of darkness. As believers, we shouldn't hesitate to pray against these and other villainous incursions.

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,*

*Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

The work of Christian life is to be conformed to Christ. **The height of St. Patrick's prayer, then, expresses here in poetic terms, the union of soul and Savior.** In traditional Catholic spirituality, a believer who lives in close harmony with Jesus can be called *an alter Christus*, that is, another Christ.

*I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.*

The final lines of the Breastplate repeat the opening lines. While notable and lovely simply in terms of its poetic expression, a deeper truth is here expressed. **Everything—all that is, was, and will be—comes forth from the love of God and returns back to him.** Philosophers call this structure the *exitus-reditus*. God, the origin of all things, calls all things back unto himself. Thus the journey of Christian life – conversion, mission, and redemption – unfolds in every life this dynamic plan of God, intended from the beginning.