

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE ROAD MUST BE TROD

“At least for a while,” said Elrond. “The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.”

—J.R.R. Tolkien  
*The Lord of the Rings*

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EVERY TWO OR THREE YEARS I blow the dust off *The Lord of the Rings* along with its prequel, *The Hobbit*, and treat myself to a generous dose of Middle Earth. I would not be exaggerating to say this is my dozenth time or so. What makes my current quest through Lothlórien significantly different from all previous journeys, however, is that this time around I am returned to the Catholic Faith.

“Prophecy” is not a word I apply lightly, especially in these confusing times, but I can’t help but note a remarkable parallel between the state of the Roman Catholic Church today and the shadow that brooded over Middle Earth in Tolkien’s imagination. His own Catholicity shines forth throughout the work, as does his insight into the nature of evil and—most significantly to us—the stuff of those who are called to combat it. Hear Gandalf’s answer to Frodo’s pitiful cry of “Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?”

“You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: nor for powers or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.”

—J.R.R.Tolkien  
*The Lord of the Rings*

Not the answer any of us wants to hear, to be sure. Who of us feels up to the awesome task of holding firmly to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith against all odds, challenging all persecutors, defending the honor of Our Lady when only a few still call Her blessed? Reading about the Ignatius Loyolas and Athanasiuses of past ages is all very uplifting before settling down into a comfortable bed, but finding ourselves actually living in equally horrific times is quite another matter! Who—we ask ourselves in all sincerity—are we?

Did not Francis of Assisi feel the same bewilderment when he found himself surrounded by a veritable pigsty of sacerdotal excess and gluttony? Or Athanasius when he was excommunicated by the majority of the world’s bishops because he fought the Arian heresy which they embraced? Or Pope Pius V as the Muslim hordes encircled Christendom? Or Louis Marie de Montfort as he was driven out of diocese after diocese by those in ecclesiastical authority? Surely in times of weakness, humiliation, and frustration they must have balked at the sheer audacity of their predicament. Who were they to take on the world?

And who are we?

We, as it turns out, are all that is left; and we must do all we can with what modicum of strength and courage we possess to carry on till the end. We cannot sit back and wait for knights and warriors to wage war in our stead. Such luxury is lost to us. Those who should be our defenders busy themselves with other matters.

My friends, welcome to Reality. Out of all possible centuries during which you and I could have been born, God in His Omnipotence knew that this would be the optimum time for each of us to effect our Salvation. Think about that. Let it percolate deep down into your being. No human life is an accident or a throw of the dice. Each soul is infinitely precious and profoundly significant in the eyes of God.

“But if only I’d been born in a safer, saner age,” I have sometimes sulked with trembling thumb inserted between pouting lips. “Why couldn’t I have landed in some peaceful medieval hamlet built by the sweat of simple peasants around a lovely church run by a devout priest who just leaked awe for God everywhere he went and who would instantly drop pen, fork, or hammer to hear the confession of a penitent sinner, day or night ...?”

Let us be frank. Honesty requires it and the situation demands no less. I know myself better than that, and God’s insight is keener still. Life in such a quaint setting would have bored me to nooks. Any faith I would have managed to summon would have been complacent at best and vacuous at worst. Who knows? I may have ended up as the town drunk.

But look at me now: pounding my desk in outrage, poring over tattered volumes of doctrine and history discarded by seminary libraries, debating Dogmas with others of the same ilk, denigrating dim bishops for their heresies and clacking the keys of this computer with ebullient abandon. My Faith is alive; I’m having a ball!

For this I was born. This is my time.

“... Do we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daytime?”

“A man may do both,” said Aragorn. “For not we but those who come after will make the legends of our time. The green earth, you say? That is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread it under the light of day!”

—J.R.R. Tolkien  
*The Lord of the Rings*

And it’s also your time. Many were the Saints who looked forward to this age and yearned to take part in the conflict we face. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves, rather than crying over the spilled milk of post-conciliar apostasy, instead of wringing our hands in despondent dismay, we should rejoice in the honor that God has bestowed upon us—*us!*—to defend the Faith, to stand up to the enemies of the Church, and to endure whatever comes.

Let us never forget this profound promise bequeathed to us in the writings of St. Paul:

And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints.

—Romans VIII:28

All that is happening around us in the world today, in society, in the Church, in our personal lives—everything is working together for our explicit good. We must love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our concentration; and hold onto this promise for dear life. It is all for our good. If we view the dementia around us through the lens of this truth, we will find that it does make sense after all. And when our resolve wobbles and we feel the self-sniffles coming on again, we can recall another promise, this one uttered by the Savior Himself:

The things that are impossible with men, are possible with God ...

Amen, I say to you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,

Who shall not receive much more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

—St. Luke XVIII:27, 29-30

Yes, welcome to Reality. It will be very hard, but the road must be trod.