

The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels
29 September, Anno Domini 2019
St. Matthew 18:1-11
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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We may have a lot of questions about angels but one thing is made abundantly clear in Holy Scripture - St. Michael and his angelic brethren in arms find the greatest joy in your salvation. They delight in God and His will and His will is fixed upon saving you. Thus, this is what the angels desire and they serve God to that end - to protect and minister to the redeemed of the Lord, from the tiniest infant to saint preparing to close her eyes for the last time on this side of eternity. Though we are not aware of them or interact with them, and we certainly don't pray to them, the angels serve God by serving us.

One of the ways they serve us is most definitely by waging war against the ancient serpent and his evil angels. This isn't the stuff of fantasy novels. There is an intensely real war being waged all around us right now and we are smack dab in the middle of it. In fact, we are the subject of that war. Our eternal future is what is at stake. Satan hated God and sought to dethrone Him. But St. Michael and his angels, faithful servants of God, cast Satan down to earth. Here, he awaits that day when the final judgment will be rendered and he will be cast forever into the hell of fire with his angels and those who are not found to be in Christ. But until that day, Satan is obsessed with ensuring that as many people as possible join him in eternal destruction. His only interest in you is your eternal judgment. He wants you to suffer the same wrath of God by joining him in his attempted coup, an utterly foolish venture which will, without doubt, fail. But Satan will try nonetheless.

But don't think that you're just an idle bystander. You are in the thick of it. The fog of war surrounds hems you in. You can't escape it and only to your eternal peril do you ignore it. Death is everywhere. Disease. Hatred. War. Greed. Pornography. Anger. Slander. These are all Satan's works. They are meant to turn man against God and against his fellow man. When we engage them, we fight Satan's war for him. We help him destroy others and in the process also destroy ourselves. He will then become your accuser, driving your conscience into sorrow and despair because the accusations are true. And for your trouble, you will have earned the wrath of God.

Satan's weapons aren't ICBMs or drones or battalions of soldiers. If they were, it would be much easier to recognize the enemy and fight. But his weapons are deceit, temptation, pleasure, and persecution. He is the deceiver. He lies. He doesn't chase you into hell with a pitchfork. With smooth words and eloquent speech He entices you to walk right into the pit by choice. He twists and bends the truth which God has spoken so that you take small steps off the path of life until you are hopelessly lost. He lures you in with delusions of self-righteousness. He presents the most vile, selfish, and destructive works as beautiful, pleasurable, desirable, and good. He strokes our ego telling us how wise we are. He praises our feeble intellect as genius. He tries to pit science against the Creator, though good science affirms again and again the order and design of creation.

This is why we pray every morning and evening that God would send His holy angels to be with us and defend us. The battle is fierce and the warfare is long. We are in danger and we need help. We can't survive this relentless onslaught alone. The devil knows no mercy. He never tires. He fights dirty, even disguising himself as an angel of light, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. He doesn't care how old or how young you are. He doesn't care if you're healthy or lying on your death bed. Male or female, rich or poor, from every nation under heaven - he wants every last man, woman, and child to trust in anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He doesn't care what it is as long as it's not Jesus.

Notice how the disciples had been deceived. Christ had recently spoken about being betrayed, killed, and resurrected. And what was on their minds? "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Each disciple was hoping that Jesus would pick him out and say "Of course, you are!" But God isn't interested in such things. Really, God hates such egotistical and self-centered thoughts. They are the very root of what is wrong with man. Thus, Christ squelches our foolish desire for vanity and says that we must become as children if we wish to even enter heaven. We must turn away from the poisonous desire for greatness and notoriety and be humbled.

But this humility isn't a subjective quality that you can create in yourself. It's not the kind of humility that simply puts other people first and is always polite. If it were, a little child would be about the worst example Jesus could have chosen. Little children are inherently self-centered. They are essentially their own world. They want food...now. They want to be picked up...now. They don't want this toy, they want the one their friend is playing with...now. One of the duties given to parents is to teach their children to think of others, to be selfless. It is an

exceedingly difficult job because the default position of our nature is to think of ourselves and what we want.

The humility which Christ is referring to in children is their complete and utter dependence upon their parents to care for them and their assumption that their parents will do just that. Babies don't politely wait for their mothers to nurse them - they make their need known and fully expect that their mother will provide. When the child messes his pants, he doesn't quietly go and clean himself up so as not to interrupt his parents, if he even bothers to notice at all. Instead, the child has every confidence that Mom or Dad will handle the situation and not despise him for it or be too grossed out by it or abuse him in his vulnerability. Children cannot provide for themselves. They don't even know what they need. They are completely and utterly dependent on their parents to care and provide for every need. And that is the humility that is needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is a condition of being. We must be as the child who expects without doubt every good from his mother and father, who, without hesitation, with all boldness and confidence, asks for whatever it is he wants or needs and has no doubt that they will give him at least that if not even better. It is a condition of helplessness.

We can do nothing for ourselves. We are not strong. We are not capable. We are not wise. It is a complete and utter delusion to think otherwise. Every good we have comes alone from God our heavenly Father. And unlike sinful parents of flesh and blood, our heavenly Father always and only gives what is good. He never hesitates because it is inconvenient or because it will cost too much. He never loses His temper and lashes out in anger at we who are but dust. He never wishes that He didn't have to take care of you. Your needs are not an annoyance to Him. His love is never based upon how good we are as children. It is based upon His eternal and unchanging love and mercy. He never abuses us or takes advantage of our weakness or despises us for our weakness. His every concern is for our good.

This is why Christianity is harder for adults than children and why Jesus didn't choose an adult when putting forth the example of true faith. Adults want to be something. We want to be important and noticed. We obsess about foolish things like greatness. We despise weakness and helplessness. We adore strength. We laud those who appear put together and in control. We praise autonomy and those who act according to the nonsensical idea of their own truth. These aren't things that God desires or praises. These are idolatry.

The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is Christ our Lord who didn't consider greatness something to be grasped at or sought after. Instead, He humbled Himself and took the form of a servant, your form, so that He could serve you. He submitted Himself wholly to the will of His Father who desired His beloved Son's death so that you could live. And that is exactly what Jesus did. He received in faith what His Father gave. He denied the hunger of His flesh in the wilderness until His Father gave food. He sought out the weak, the humble, the despised, the outcast so that He might deliver them and bestow upon them the kingdom of heaven. He joyfully picked up your cross, bearing in His flesh the guilt of all sinners, and endured the abandonment of His Father in perfect faith, trusting the good and gracious will of His Father. He desired nothing more than what His Father desired. He claimed no rights. He refused to save Himself because it would have meant your eternal damnation. He used His power and authority to heal, to comfort, to forgive, to save, to swallow up death for you.

And what did the angels do when Jesus died? They didn't weep. They weren't sad. They weren't distraught. They rejoiced. They didn't feel sorry for Jesus, like we so often do. They were thrilled on our behalf because the curse of death had been lifted. Heaven was filled with shouts of joy and triumph because the Blood of the Lamb poured on Calvary as the atoning sacrifice had conquered the ancient serpent. The Blood of Jesus, the perfect and complete payment for sin, forever silences every accusation that Satan can hurl at you. Man was free! Now all who confess Christ's saving Name, are at peace with God. Now all who become as little children, despising greatness and strength and wisdom and pleasure, all who confess their helplessness and need for God to save them and cleanse them and provide for them - these are the ones who will know the peace and joy of God our heavenly Father. God is great precisely because He has no use for the kind of greatness that we lust after. Those who are great in the kingdom of heaven are those whom the world despises - the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are persecuted, those who seek peace, those who speak the truth even when the whole world hates them for it.

Dear baptized children of God, repent of your desires for greatness and of any delusion that God expects you to outgrow your daily and constant need for Him. Instead, trust the only One who is God and Father, who provides for your every need, who commands His holy angels to watch over you, who has thrown down the great accuser, and who has promised to you every blessing of His kingdom. Be completely and utterly helpless before Him, as helpless as a newborn infant, for such belongs the kingdom of God.

In the Name of +Jesus.