

The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (transferred)
27 September, Anno Domini 2020
Revelation 12:7-12
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The revelation granted to St. John, while very difficult to understand in places, is truly a source of great preparation and comfort for Christians. That is why the vision was given and why the apostle was commanded to write it down. These visions are for our benefit and so we do well to meditate on them, even if at times we have to say “I don’t fully understand but, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be unto me according to your word.”

To rightly understand the text from Revelation before us we need a little context. Without that, we may get confused as to what’s actually happening. Chapter 12 concerns what John saw concerning a woman and a child and a red dragon. The woman gives birth to the Child but the dragon seeks the Child’s destruction and sweeps 1/3 of the stars of heaven down to the earth with his tail. However, the Child is caught up to God and to His throne and the woman flees into the wilderness to a place God prepared for her where He will nourish her for 1260 days.

Today’s text follows those events. In this vision, the woman is the Church, the Child is Jesus Christ, and the red dragon is Satan. We might have assumed that the woman was Mary because she gives birth to Jesus but here the woman is the Church through whom the promised Messiah comes. Now, the whole ministry of Christ is condensed to simply “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.” (v5). Satan, though he tried relentlessly to destroy Jesus was not able and Christ ascended to the throne of God.

Thus the war of which we heard is not the war at the beginning when Satan and his angels initially rebelled against God. The war before us today takes place after Christ’s ascension. Until the Ascension, Satan appears to have been able to still approach God in heaven. The most well-known example of this is when Job approaches God to challenge the genuineness of the patriarch Job’s faith. The other lesser know example occurs in Zechariah when the devil stands before God leveling accusations against the high priest Joshua who was among the exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

But no longer. The God-man having made full atonement for the sins of the world, Satan and his accusations no longer have any place in the heavenly court room. The ancient accuser must give way to the victorious Christ who has been raised from the dead in triumph and who now sits on God's throne. His pierced hands and feet and His pierced side are the eternal evidence that Satan's efforts before God are not only in vain but are false. The Blood of the Lamb has conquered the dragon.

And thus Michael and his legions of angels carry out the will of the Father to banish Satan from heaven for eternity. The sins of the saints will no longer be heard in heaven because Christ has made satisfaction by His holy and innocent Blood. And behold the great joy in all of heaven because the salvation of man, your salvation, has been accomplished! "Rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." And rejoice they do, endlessly celebrating this victory which God has accomplished for man for all eternity, rejoicing that Satan and sin and death have been defeated for ever.

But the battle is far from over even though the outcome is sealed. It continues on a different field - the field of this world. The woman, the Church, remains in the wilderness protected by God and fed by Him but nonetheless endlessly harassed by Satan. But only until at the appointed time, the Lord Christ returns in glory and majesty to make His rule visible and forever cast away Satan and his fellow fallen angels and those who refused the testimony of the saints and the Blood that would have freed them from death.

Satan's hatred of God has only grown exponentially since he was driven from God's presence and even more since he failed to destroy the Christ Child and was driven from even taking audience with God. Now the Church and her offspring must suffer Satan's raging. But we suffer it in the full assurance that God will faithfully deliver us according to His promises. For this reason, we are the Church Militant. We do not yet enjoy the rest we long for. We must fight each and every day. We can't be disengaged spectators. There is no such thing in this war. We mustn't fail to take up the weapons and armor provided or we will be overrun and swallowed by death. We are hunted by the most vicious and cunning enemy of

them all - an enemy who has had millennia to sharpen his skills and soak in his wrath.

There is nothing from which Satan will spare the Church or you as her offspring in order to destroy us and drag our souls back into hell. And make no mistake, there will be earthly manifestations just as there will spiritual attacks waged directly against your soul. There will be outward persecutions from men and there will be suffering and trials and tribulations. But, in the end, all of it is symptomatic of the one spiritual battle. As St. Paul writes, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but abasing the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." If we lose sight of that, we will fall for the devil's tactics and our attention will be drawn away from the real enemy. The days we find ourselves in are wonderful examples of that. If we are not careful we will miss the fact that the real enemy in all of this is Satan who is pouring gasoline on the fires of fear and division and hatred that already burn within the hearts of every sinner. We may think this is about elections and masks and liberties and viruses. But these are smoke screens behind which Satan is working feverishly to impede the spread of the Gospel, cast people into panic and fear, and turn neighbor against neighbor. And looking around, I'd say he's doing a very good job. We're missing the point. We're not seeing the spiritual war that is raging and we're taking up the wrong weapons. Instead of the Blood and the testimony, instead of prayer and hymns, we try to arm ourselves with the right politicians, science, firearms, and Molotov cocktails.

God will no longer listen to accusations filled with lies. But Satan is hoping that perhaps we will; perhaps he can get us to doubt the Blood and the absolution of Christ and so be overrun with despair; perhaps he can get us to listen to his accusations against one another so that we who share the Blood of Christ see each other as the problem and the enemy rather than him; perhaps he can convince us that we no longer need the Blood and the testimony that conquered him or convince us that those things are really useless and can't help us in our troubles. We are engaged in a spiritual war that has only one purpose - to steal Christians away from Christ and keep the Gospel from reaching anyone else lest they believe and are snatched out of the devil's kingdom.

But do not fear. Though the fight is fierce and the warfare long, you do not fight alone. When Satan was cast down to earth, God sent His warriors to stand beside you and fight with you and for you. This is not simply a metaphor or a fake image meant to give you fake comfort. Real angels surround you and stand at the ready

to defend you against the dragon and his legions. We do well to remember when the king of Syria surrounded the city where Elisha was. Elisha's servant panicked until Elisha said "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" and the Lord opened the servants eyes to see what constantly surrounds God's people - mountains full of horses and chariots of fire all around. We are surrounded by the servants of God day and night who constantly fight for and defend His people.

God knows what we are all hesitant to admit - we cannot stand against Satan on our own. We are weak. Our flesh is weak. Indeed, our flesh would gladly switch sides and ally itself with the one who seeks our destruction. We are fools if we imagine that we can defeat the devil by our own means, with our own strength of will. He deceived Adam and Eve in paradise. Do you think you are stronger or more pious than they? Repent. Satan will be driven away by only one thing - the Word of God. His accusations and lies can only be silenced by the Blood of Jesus which is the testimony of Holy Scripture. This is why our Lord puts a small child before the disciples as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It's not that the child is innocent. It is that the child can only depend on another for survival. We must be that way. We must depend entirely on God for all things and claim nothing for ourselves. We must cry out to God our Father no matter the need because we have nothing and can do nothing apart from Him. Thus we pray in the morning and evening prayer that God would let His holy angel be with us, that the evil foe would have no power over us.

And this is exactly what the holy angels do. They call us back to the Blood which was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. They call us back to the testimony of the prophets and apostles who point us to the Messiah and faithfully teach us the will of God. They hold back the full brunt of what Satan wishes to unleash against us. They deliver the faithful message of God which is that before the throne of God no accusations against the Baptized are even heard. It doesn't matter how loudly the accuser shouts about your sins, God is not listening. The only voice the Father hears is the voice of the Savior saying "Father, forgive them." You are a beloved child of God, He Himself has declared it to be so.

And here, in the Divine Service, where the veil between heaven and earth is at its thinnest, the Lord Jesus stands before you to give you the very Blood that has redeemed you and cleansed you of all your sin. Here through messengers of flesh, the saints of old give their faithful testimony the victorious Christ who was crucified, died, and was buried. Here you take up that testimony and make it your

own as with one voice we all declare “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty. And in one Lord Jesus Christ. I believe in the Holy Spirit.” We are gathered together here as the whole Christian Church in heaven and on earth, of all times and places, with angels and archangels, around the throne of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is heaven. Here in our Savior’s presence, Satan and his angels are cast out and his lying accusations are silenced. Satan cannot remain where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is heard and believed. He must flee. Beloved, here we are wrapped up for a brief moment into the very thing which we long to enjoy uninterrupted for all eternity. With the patriarch Jacob we can truly say “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” Wherever the testimony and the Blood are found, there you have found heaven.

Here also you are armed. Not with swords or shields but with the divine Word that silences the unholy accusatory word of Satan. With this Word you can put the whole host of hell to flight. One little Word can fell them all - “is”. “This IS my Blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” The Blood of God’s Son, your Brother, has overcome Satan and his accusations against you and will be your shield, your sword, your helmet, your whole armor against every attempt of the devil to sweep you out of God’s presence.

Dear Christian, take this war seriously or you will suffer the fate of the demons. If you despise the Blood and the testimony you will fall on the battle field and be taken captive and suffer eternal torment. God would not have it be so. The Lord has spared nothing to give you everything needed to stand in the hour of temptation and in the face of the devil’s accusations. Return to heaven again and again that you may be refreshed and strengthened by the true Blood of Christ and the testimony of your salvation until the same angels who fought beside you carry you out of this valley of sorrow safely into the uninterrupted presence of God, His saints, and his angelic servants.

In the Name of +Jesus.