

St. Michael and All Angels; September 29, 2019
“What About Those Angels?”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today is the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels. It is an important feast day, for many reasons; not least of which is the many false beliefs that surround angels today. Scripture does not say much about these messengers, and we often get lazy in translating, because we don't know much either. The word angel means messenger, and that is what they are about: messages.

Many sermons on this day will seek to focus on angels, as we tend to picture them, but just as the Bible is not about you, it is not about them. They work, they serve messages. What we know is limited. There are many angels, many messengers, both good and bad. The bad angels seek to destroy faith, destroy the Gospel; and the good angels serve the message of Christ and His salvation on the cross for you. The chief evil angel we know as the devil, the deceiver. His greatest message is deception; seeking to cast doubt upon the clear words of God.

Matthew records these words for us, *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea,”* and, *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”* It would have been very easy for God to shield and protect us, His beloved children, against all danger in a very direct way and to do so immediately by His own hand; however, in His grace and wisdom, He has entrusted this service to the angels.

In this profoundly simple way, He teaches us about humility; that is how God works, *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death*

*on a cross.*¹

In our text, our Lord extols the humility needed to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. It is not about greatness as a child thinks of himself. Children are important and can teach us a lot of things. Lately, the world has turned to children as the experts on almost everything. They bring a simple perspective that is lost by many; but children are not experts. I was not the only child who was self-centered; nor, am I still the only child that is self-absorbed.

The nature of a child is dependent and vulnerable; and for the most part – unafraid. A child is mostly unaware of his humility and simply considers the world to be rightly ordered; this begins at a very young age. He is comforted by those in authority over him. He messes his diaper, and expects his mother to clean it up with almost no thought at all. He cannot clean it himself. If he tries, he will make it worse. So he lies down on his back, throws up his legs without shame. He is confident that though he is vulnerable, though his most sensitive parts are exposed, she will not laugh at him, be disgusted, or abuse him in anyway. She will cleanse and refresh him. That is the humility that Our Lord extols.

It is humility, but it can also be called faith or trust or confidence. This is what saves men; no one can enter into the Kingdom of God without it. The disciples were arguing about which one of them is the greatest, and Jesus puts a child in their midst and bluntly exhorts them, “You are not even asking the right question. You are way off. Greatness is not even on the radar of what you should care about, unless you are like this child; you won’t even get in!” This is the message of salvation. It is a child who gets in, not demanding, all-important, so-called independent great adults; they have already determined they are great and only want to rank their greatness. They live as though they do not need the kingdom, or as though it really isn’t that important; and the hard truth for us to swallow is not only are they not great, they don’t even get into the Kingdom of God.

Some do enter the Kingdom of God. It is not simply those who are modest, sensitive, and polite; no, it is those who are completely dependent on Jesus Christ, who are cleansed by Him, who are cared for and protected and fed and looked after by Him.

¹ Philippians 2:3-8

Those who are soiled with sin, who have messed their shorts, a complete blow-out, and whom would make it worse, if they tried to clean it themselves. Those who enter the Kingdom are those who cannot do these things for themselves, who do not even know what needs to be done. These poor miserable sinners lie down on their backs and throw up their legs, fully confident that the Lord will not laugh at them or be disgusted by them, or in any way abuse them, but that He will cleanse them and love them. These are the saints of Jesus Christ. Humility is not so much a subjective attitude as it is an objective reality.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we should not be surprised that babies can have faith. They are not the exception. They are the rule. Adult faith is the exception. It is adults who are ashamed of their stink and try to hide it, deny it, or take care of it themselves. It is children who listen with trust and confidence to the message of the Gospel. It is adults who try and do it themselves, needing no help, especially from Jesus.

The angels watch all of this. They are not merely messengers and protectors and warriors. They are also watchers. They rejoice over one sinner who repents, over one child who is made clean. They also watch the face of the Father for they are Holy. They belong to Him. He loves them and they love Him. That is why they watch you. The Holy Angels love to watch the people of God being loved by God.

To this end, the Father has given His angels charge over you. They are to care for you and to watch. You are engaged in a holy war. You are largely unaware of the battles that rage around and through you. This is part of the invisible world created by God. It is of this realm that we ask many questions, and let imaginations run wild; especially through the month of October; but children trust in what they know. They have faith and confidence in the Gospel, in the Word that cleaved the darkness, and at whose speaking it was done.

Every time you resist temptation, say your prayers, serve your neighbor, read your Bible, come to Church, the demons are beaten back. The holy angels fight at your side against the demons. The demons are also angels, unholy, fallen angels. They also watch you and they wait but they despair. There is no joy in them over you because you belong to the Father and they cannot have you. They have already lost.

The holy Angels, whose face is toward the Father, love the Truth of Jesus Christ. This is what they proclaimed to Shepherds, to Mary and Zechariah and Abraham. So the Holy Angels also love it when you come to Church and they get to listen in. They love the Word of God preached and given in the Holy Supper and Absolution.

They love Bible Study. They love catechesis. They love it when you pray. They are watching and they are rejoicing. They are warrior spirits who excel in strength and do the gracious will of the Lord. In you, whom they join in the Holy Communion, they recognize their brothers, brothers of Jesus Christ, their Lord. They have been called to serve you and they join their praise and their prayers to yours. They are far more aware of us than we are of them.

Don't misunderstand the term guardian angels. What they are to guard is faith. They seek to keep you as a child who trusts. If you want to believe otherwise, simply remember all the martyrs. Did they not have faith? They died in some pretty horrible ways. If angels only seek to guard our physical bodies from harm or death, then what about their angels. Did they suck at their jobs? Did they forget? Were they late for work that day? No of course not; it is for your faith they watch and guard.

The evil angels are scary. That is how they operate; they work in the dark. Like Adam and Eve, they work in "curiosity killed the cat." How many deaths occur in horror movies because someone is curious and ventures into places they shouldn't go? How many children are afraid of the dark? How many fears of the dark are exacerbated for the next 33 days? And what are those but vivid manifestations of deeper fears? They are commentaries on our many fears, but whether it is of faceless death like Michael Myers or being made-fun of by a mean co-worker or classmate—the reality is these fears are all childish.

Hear this rightly. Fear is part of being a human, and for this reason fear in the Old Testament is always associated with the proper worship of God. Do you ever find it odd that the Children of Israel can go from walking through the Red Sea on dry ground to worshipping false gods in just a few verses? They heard mixed messages. They were children. They were curious and spent much time doing things they were not supposed to, and going to places not allowed.

Rather than trusting in what God had spoken, instead of doing what He taught them to do for their own protection and safety, rather than speaking the Word of God when they lay down and when they rose and every moment of the day, they spoke and lived other words.

They devoted more time to understanding the dark, than living in the light. They were afraid, and they assumed that if they could understand the dark better, it would make it easier or less scary. Instead, it always ended up being worse. Their fears were childish and misguided. They feared the unknown, more than they feared the One True God.

Proper fear means proper trust, and Your Father is merciful. There is nothing in the darkness, nothing in Hell, that can snatch you out the Father's hand. There is nothing visible or invisible that can keep the Father from loving you, ***“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”***²

Christ has claimed you as His own and His angels fight for you, ***“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***³ As you in Christ, as you are in His Word, You are never alone. You are never forgotten or neglected; you are baptized!

In this world of increasing connectivity, and at the same time, increasing loneliness, you are in the Body of Christ. You are baptized into a body that has One Head and life eternal. You embody the mystery into which angels long to peer. The grace of God, as unrealistic as it seems, as unexpected and even insane as it is, is the very foundation of the Universe: the King takes out His wrath for your crimes on His innocent Son to make you His. The Son is free but the Son pays the tax as though He were a stranger. The Son dies not for good men but for the men who abuse and kill Him; He dies for those have soiled themselves and cannot clean it up.

² Romans 8:31-32

³ Hebrews 12:1-2

It is for this very reason the angels sing and rejoice. It is always a bit surprising to us, but the holy Angels are not sad at the death of Christ. While I like the Hymn *Ride On, Ride On in Majesty*, it is not entirely correct. The angels are not sad and they do not wonder at Jesus' sacrifice.

They do not weep to see Him go to the cross. They are holy. They are of one accord with the Will of the Father. They see the death of Jesus Christ and see perfect, Divine Love and they rejoice.

They rejoice! Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, darkness, sadness, and hostility, you fear no evil, because His rod and staff, that is His Law and Gospel, comfort you. His Holy Word and His Holy Sacraments deliver His grace on the cross to you.

You, His dependent child are swept into His loving arms. He takes your soiledness and washes you clean. You, the recipients of this loving grace can ask your Dear Father as His dear children. As humble children we pray, "Our Father," and because of Christ's Ascension, you are exalted in the Kingdom of God. You are greater than the angels, and they serve you; rejoicing over sinners who repent. "***Do not be deceived: God is not mocked.***"⁴

You children who are soiled, these gifts are for you: Baptism, Confession, Preaching, the Lord's Supper. He does not laugh at you, or ridicule you; He dies for you. Through His called and ordained servants, He speaks peace, giving you light in the darkness. There is no shame, He has born it for you. You are loved and cleansed through His Son.

"For this, now and in days to be,
Our praise shall rise, O Lord, to Thee,
Whom all the angel hosts adore
With grateful songs forevermore."⁵ Amen.

May the peace of God which truly passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁴ Galatians 6:7

⁵ Lord God, to Thee We Give All Praise LSB 522:8

**Prayer of the Church
St. Michael and All Angels
29 September 2019**

O God our Father, fill us with Your Spirit, that we might put away all pride, humble ourselves, turn and become like children before You. Give us hearts to trust and depend on You for all our needs. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, like your holy angels, bless all pastors in Christ, that they would preach your words, the pure Law and the pure Gospel of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to seek and save the lost. Grant that their proclamation would go forth with power unto the salvation of all who hear and believe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, bless the members of this congregation, that they would love and care for one another, bear one another's burdens, and generously support Your ministry here at home and abroad. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, we know that Satan and his minions long to assail Your children. As we await the day of our Lord's return, keep us steadfast in the faith and shield us with Your Word of truth, that we may withstand all their assaults. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, You sent Your holy angels to comfort Your Son in Gethsemane, and You send them to Your children to guard us in all our ways. We thank You for this precious comfort, and we ask that You would continue to send them for our defense, comfort and joy of faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, You have placed authorities over us for our peace and safety. Remember our president; legislators; judges; and all those who make, administer and judge our laws. Grant them wisdom and a desire to seek Your will. Guard all those who serve in our emergency services and armed forces. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, remember in mercy all those who call upon You in their need [*especially those who have requested our prayers, including Dennis, Larry, and those we name in our hearts.*] Let Your holy angels be with them, that the wicked foe would have no power over them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants **Samantha, Finn, Nicholas, Diane, & Pam** whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted to **Chris & Cheryl and David & Sandy** during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, Your Son has told us to receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Grant that we would come to the holy altar in humility and need, receiving this blessed Sacrament with thanksgiving. Strengthen us through the same, as we return to our homes and contend against the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God our Father, we give You thanks for all who have gone before us in the faith and now rest from their labors. Keep us in holy communion with them, that our ears would join theirs in listening to the heavenly choir of angels sing Your praises on the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**