

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

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Father Robert Crouse writes on this feast, *It seems that nowadays angels have very little place in the intellectual and devotional life of Christians. Modern theologians are tongue-tied on the subject; empirical scientists cannot locate them among the revolutions of the heavens; astronauts have heard no rumour of seraphic wingbeats; and even the most pious believers are often inclined to consign the angels rather unthinkingly to the never-never land of fairy tales. To the modern mind, they seem to be figments of the imagination, having a certain appeal, perhaps, to romantic fantasy, but no genuine substantial reality.*

But what is fairy tale and fiction to the modern mind, is one of the Church's favorite celebrations. This feast is unique in the calendar of the Church's year, because the feast of St. Michael, like the feasts of St. Gabriel and St. Raphael, are not celebrations of the lives of holy humans. Since they do not have lives as we do, what then do we know about them? The Church celebrates and holds St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael before us as examples not because they were martyred for the faith, but because they are God's servants. These three are also the only angels whose names we know, they are Archangels as mentioned in the Scriptures and are "chief-angels." We are taught that there are nine different types of angels, each with a particular characteristic in their service to God, which are found throughout the Scriptures. The angels of God are present at the very beginning, *when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.* They are at the end of the Scriptures, at the end of time as the reapers, *when the harvest of the earth is ripe.* The Angels do God's bidding and so are at the heart and center of it all, at the Annunciation, the Nativity, at the Agony in the Garden, they witness all of history and all of salvation history. We are even given an image of God's throne in the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel with the Seraphim and Cherubim who veil their faces at God's glory. With such an insight into the world, with such closeness to God and to heaven, we wonder still why some angels chose not to serve God and became fallen angels or demons.

The modern mind though, as we are reminded by Fr. Crouse, wonders how any of this is practical. How can an angel be an example to humans? After all, they are not human and we cannot see them or hear them, and so we only give them a passing thought. We cannot see them, but it is not hard to find images of 'Precious Moments' angels bouncing around on clouds with wings and playing harps. Real angels, though, are very different and they are wonderful examples to us because

they continually and faithfully fulfil the role that God has called them to in service and glorification of Himself. The Angels of God exist solely to serve and glorify God. Yet we read that there was once an Archangel named Lucifer, who because of his pride, no longer wished to serve or glorify God, but himself. We hear part of his story this morning, that he and the angels which followed him were cast out of heaven. They were cast out of God's presence because there is no room in heaven for anyone with the sin of pride. There is no room for anyone in heaven who attempts to set himself up as God. Remember that the sin of pride is the root cause of every other sin. St. Michael and the holy angels in choosing to continue to serve and glorify God have chosen humility that leads to joyous eternal life while the fallen angels have chosen the pride or hubris that leads only to miserable everlasting death. The fallen angels have made their choice, and now because God allows them to tempt men, they seek to drag down as many humans with them as possible. They have committed themselves to the very opposite of their original vocation.

This same lesson from Revelation gives an explanation of the origin of the fallen angels. But we often overlook an important fact: Satan and his minions have been unleashed on the earth, they accuse and deceive, but only for a short time. The fallen angels are already condemned and defeated, they *prevail not*. Their days are numbered. St. Michael and his angels prevail over Satan because they are faithful to God and to their vocation which is to serve and glorify God. The Holy Angels are stronger than the fallen angels through the power of God. But note that even the good angels do not prevail through *the blood of the Lamb*, or *by the word of their testimony*, and they are not part of a reality where *they loved not their lives unto the death*. St. John knows the difference between angels and men. He knows that while the good angels cleave to God permanently, man must take another way, a longer road, and one that involves choices in time and space. The angels have been given their chance and they have chosen to serve and glorify God forever. As a result, they continue to do battle with the forces of evil. We, however, must also strive to live our lives as faithful servants of Christ, allowing ourselves to be marked by the blood of the Lamb, to be set apart, and to become martyrs to the world. Angels have won their war and desire to share the merits of their battle with us. But man must battle in a different way. Every Baptized Christian must do battle in time and space as he or she fights to uphold their vows and cleave to Jesus Christ.

We know how the story ends, that the battle will be won for God, that every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow to Jesus Christ, but at the present moment the battle rages on. There is sickness and disease, storms and

war, national discord and division. Everything seems to be at stake, but God and His power, the Kingdom of Heaven, these are never at stake. What is at stake is our salvation, whether or not we choose to serve and glorify God or allow ourselves to be drawn away by those forces which refuse to serve and glorify God. Let us take to heart the story of Satan, once a beautiful Archangel, a servant of God, who witnessed God do more than we can ever imagine, and yet the sin of pride clipped his wings. If the sin of pride can take down an angel, it can certainly take us down too.

We are taught that we will overcome through the blood of the Lamb, through the word of our testimony, and for making a sacrifice to God with our entire lives. This does not mean that we have to seek martyrdom as some in the Early Church did. But we must learn to be as dedicated and faithful as the Holy Angels of God. We keep this festival of the holy angels, then, to celebrate those spiritual powers, the agents of divine providence. We celebrate that each and every one of us is upheld and guarded by spiritual powers – our guardian angels. That is, of course, the point in the Gospel for this feast day, when Jesus warns against offending the innocent. *Take heed, he says, that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven.* The angels behold God's face in heaven that one day we may too.

Today we are not concerned with fairy tales or figments of imagination, we are concerned to celebrate the providence of God in the spiritual order of the universe. We are recalled to associate ourselves with that mighty host and its chieftain, Michael, in the war against spiritual wickedness. We are called upon to ally ourselves with the spiritual powers of God's providential care. *Holy Michael, archangel, defend us in the day of battle. Amen*