

Sermon for the Feast of St. Michael & All Angels

'For he will command his angels concerning you.'

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What do we make of the angels? On this most solemn celebration, how shall we rightly speak of the burning Seraphs and Thrones, the Princes and Dominions of the heavens?

It is difficult to say. So many popular depictions of the angelic servants crawl through our minds. We see them as smiling young children, winged, careless and flurrying about. We see them as women dressed in white, upon the clouds, serenading the air and stars with the melodies of the harp. We imagine them as an invisible help that averts disaster as it is about to befall us.

Yet these are the product of a vain imagination, seeking to replace the reality of the dread ministers of our God with saccharine superstitions.

So then, what do we make of the angels? On this most solemn celebration, how shall we rightly speak of the burning Seraphs and Thrones, the Princes and Dominions of the heavens?

Let us then speak of them rightly, even as God has spoken of them.

For what are the angels, but an army? And what is their work, but war?

Behold, how it is written that *'war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon.'*

For what man can test the Leviathan? And what son of men can tame him? *'For no one is so fierce that he dares to stir the serpent up. His back is made of rows of shields; his breath shows forth lightning, and his eyes are like the waking of the dawn. Out of his mouth go flaming torches. His breath ignites the coals. His heart*

is hard as stone, hard as the anvil of a millstone. He counts iron as straw, the arrow cannot make him flee. Weapons are counted as stubble, he laughs at the rattle of javelins. He looks down upon all that is exalted, he is king over all the sons of pride.'

For this, our ancient foe, the Serpent of guile, the accuser filled of malice, from our birth in the garden, has sought to devour us; that he might *'eat dust all the days of his life'*, even consume the frailty of man, who is *'but dust, and to dust he shall return.'*

Sinless Eve was deceived by his deception, and Sinless Adam was cast down by his false words. And this monstrosity, the Devil, has beguiled all mankind ever since, for he is *'a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies.'*

What man, then, shall oppose him? What son of man shall take up arms of battle against his might?

For the Lord God Himself proclaims of our adversary, *'You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.'*

See how, in his creation, the Devil is not only cunning, but beautiful. Not only is he defiled, but adorned. Every blessing of radiance was bestowed upon his raiment, even as every work of evil proceeds from his hand.

Shall you then, dear children of Adam, resist him who no flesh can touch? Shall you then strike him whose *'bones are as rods of bronze, and his limbs as bars of iron?'*

Despair, O children of Adam, for *'though the sword reaches him, it does not avail, nor the spear, the arrow, or the javelin.'* There is no salvation against his might, nor is there escape from his thirst for your soul, *'Therefore behold, the hope of man is false, at the sight of Leviathan he is laid low.'*

But God shall not allow man to be destroyed, nor suffer His image within man to be desecrated.

So He has called forth the Archangel Michael to strike the dragon, and by the trumpet he has assembled the heavenly legions to rain judgment upon the fallen angels. St. Michael conquered in the heavenly places, *'and there was no longer any place for the fallen angels in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels with him.'*

The heavens are purified of the darkness of the devil's presence, and no longer shall his accusations resound in the courts of the Most High.

Yet upon this earth his angels now wander *'in waterless places'*, and Satan *'walks to and fro upon the earth, marching up and down over it' 'seeking whom he may devour.'* His putrescence fills the fallen world, even as his malice fills the human heart.

The battle over heaven has ended, but the war over earth is begun.

What flesh shall stand against this all-consuming beast, and what son of man shall withstand the terrors of his violence? Yet a voice resounds forth from on high, the eternal Word crying out to the Father, *'Here I am, send me.'*

'So for us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, and was made man.'

This our champion, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall bear His arm against the hateful serpent, and by His words, the Lord shall silence *'him that speaks lies.'*

For *'even as by one man, sin entered the world, and death through sin, so it is fitting that by one man salvation come into the world' 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.'*

God made man, as man, enters time to bring vengeance upon the *'god of this world'*.

Yet it is the way of this wicked Satan to bring oppression upon mankind through his pride. Therefore it is the way of our glorious savior to bring liberation to mankind through His humiliation. *'For the mighty he hath cast down from their*

thrones, and he hath exalts the lowly.'

Therefore *'He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.'*

Remember, now, how it was by a deception that the devil caused the death of the First Adam.

See, now, how it is by a deception that the Second Adam causes the death of the devil.

For disguised in the frailty of human flesh, and exhausted by the cruelty of every torture born of perverse human imagination, Our Lord Jesus presents Himself, meek and broken, before the *'power of the prince of the air'*, there to entice him into single combat, even as the ancient heroes of old.

The Leviathan, seeing the feebleness of human infirmity upon the cross, devours Our Lord, swallowing Him as he has gorged on so many human souls.

'And he descended into hell.'

Yet it is written *'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'* And even as a great fish, upon eating a fisherman's bate, finds beneath it the hook which pierces its lip, so too did Satan, upon consuming the bloodied corpse of Christ, find beneath it all the majesty of the Godhead. The mouth of Leviathan's lies is pierced. The blasphemy of Satan's tongue is muted.

For now Our Lord's power is made manifest; from within the choked throat of Satan, He bursts forth, radiant and glorified.

'And on the third day, he rose again from the dead.'

Draw near to the tomb, and peer in. Enter the hewn stone of Christ's grave, and see that the Lord has been raised.

The angel greets you, dear Christian, and explains the absence of his God and your God, his Lord and your Lord. *'He is arisen, he is not here.'* *'He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'*

For Christ our God is not finished; His vengeance against the evil one is not complete, though His victory *'is finished'*. The Lord goes forth to Galilee of the Gentiles, and unto all the world, to pursue the unrighteous spirits, to hunt down

fleeing Satan.

And the angel gives you orders, *'go with him to Galilee.'* Go, therefore, to war. Go therefore, you redeemed of humanity, you born of water and of blood; march beneath the banner of the Triune God, Our God made man before us as our king and commander, and innumerable angels to the left and right as our comrades in arms, and our companions in combat.

For it is into this Great War that we, the baptized, go, for the Word Incarnate who leads the way has proclaimed *'I come not to bring peace, but a sword.'* *'A sword that lays bare the throat of every intention of the heart.'*

On this Feast of All Angels, we greet the radiant knights who flank us on either side, singing in rapturous harmonies the song of our deliverance, crying forth *'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 cast down.'*

Embrace them with joy, the Seraphs engulfed in holy light, the Glorious Ones bearing swords of fire, and Saint Michael, captain of this righteous legion, all of them our brethren in life, our comrades in strife, our attendants in death, as we process through this life to storm the gates of hell, that our king once for all proclaim His justice, and damn the Father of Lies into the lake of unending fire *'prepared beforehand for the devil and all his angels.'*

Witness then this great army of heavenly knights as they accompany you, you, the image of their God and the object of their devotion, as the Church daily enters the battlefield of this mortal life to shatter the dominion of Satan and reclaim the world for the Kingdom of God.

And fear not that *'a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right side.'*

For *'many are the afflictions of the righteous. But the Lord delivers them out of them all.'* Then:

'You will look with your eyes, and see the recompense of the wicked.'

To Christ alone be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, unto the end of the age. AMEN.

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1-3; Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 10:17-20.