

The Feast of St. Michael & All Angels, A&D, 2008

Matthew 18:1-10 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but 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. ⁷ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. ¹⁰ "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. 11: *For the Son of Man came to save the lost*

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Imagine there were a serial killer living in your town. How safe would you feel? Would you still leave your doors unlocked and your children unsupervised? What if he lived, not just in your town, but in your neighborhood? Would you go for walks after dark? What if he lived, not just in your neighborhood, but next door to you? Would you go outside at all? Would you ever open the blinds? What if he lived, not next door to you, but in your house? What if he didn't just live in your house, but what if he also followed you everywhere you went? That would be preferable to reality. Seriously. Reality seems much worse. A serial killer can only destroy your body. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Devils all the world do fill, all eager to devour you (1 Pe 5:8). But they're not just after your life. Sure, they would enjoy inflicting some pain or suffering. But what they really want is your eternal life. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12). We fight against the devil.

2 In the Old Testament reading for today, the battle lines were clearly drawn, and Daniel was afraid. The kings of the world against the prince of the angels. The wicked versus the wise. Those who will rise to everlasting life against those who will rise to everlasting shame and contempt. Daniel could see more clearly than you that he was vastly outnumbered. He knew of the roaring devil who prowled, seeking to devour him. He knew, and he was terrified. But the angel of the Lord drove away Daniel's fear with the promise of the archangel Michael who would fight on his behalf. And despite the time of trouble, Daniel and his people would be delivered because the Lord sent St. Michael to their rescue.

3 Is that how you think of angels? As fierce warriors dispatched at the Lord's command to defend you against the assaults of the devil? It's what Dr Luther encourages you to pray morning and evening: let Your Holy Angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. They're not plump little cherubs, they won't bring you good luck, and they're not cute like your kids in a Christmas pageant. They're fierce. In Holy Scripture, they do three things: they speak God's word; they sing God's praises; and they fight against evil angels. The church celebrates the feast day of an angel to remember the Lord's gracious activity to send His angels to fight away the murderous devil.

4 The war is already over. War arose in heaven one Friday. God the Son had departed heaven to dwell on earth. He had taken human flesh in the womb of a virgin. He had lived a sinless life, even withstanding the temptations from the devil. But now the dragon, the devil, thought he had secured his victory. He had beaten the Son of God by having Him nailed to a cross. And when God the Son died, the accuser was sure he had won. But at that moment, when God died on a cross on earth, as the dragon and his angels fought against Michael and his angels, the devil lost. The great dragon was thrown down, the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. It wasn't even a close fight. The devil cannot come close to the power of God, to be sure. But he couldn't even overpower the Lord's angels. So the heavens rejoice at this resounding victory!

6 But the earth does not, at least not as much. The only place the devil still reigns is the earth, and that only for a little while. Woe to you, earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows his time is short. His power is shattered, but he'll do what he can to take as many of the Lord's beloved creatures with him on his way to hell. He is wicked beyond comparison. And he wants nothing more than for you to die eternally. So he will trick you into thinking sin is fun, into looking for loopholes in God's law, into giving in to temptation. Woe to the world for temptations to sin. If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. But before you run to grab a knife, take a better look at yourself. It is not your hand, your foot, or your eye that causes you to sin. It's your heart. Tearing it out and throwing it away—dying—is the only thing that will stop sin.

7 Death is the only way out. But not your death. It was the death of Christ, the Son of God, that brought about the devil's defeat. And He has joined you into His death through the waters of Holy Baptism. You have a new heart and a new life. You have the very righteousness of Jesus. And you have angels who fight for

you. Michael and his angels did not rest after casting the devil out of heaven. Now they hold him at bay; they serve the beloved children of God; they fight for you.

8 Is there any hymn that better jeers at the devil and reminds him of his defeat?

1 Christ, the Lord of hosts, unshaken
By the devil's seething rage,
Thwarts the plan of Satan's minions;
Wins the strife from age to age;
Conquers sin and death forever;
Slams them in their steely cage.

2 Michael fought the heav'nly battle,
Godly angels by his side;
Warred against the ancient serpent,
Foiled the beast, so full of pride,
Cast him earthbound with his angels;
Now he prowls, unsatisfied.

4 Jesus came, this word fulfilling,
Trampled Satan, death defied;
Bore the brunt of our temptation,
On the wretched tree He died.
Yet to life was raised victorious;
By His life our life supplied.

5 Swift as lightning falls the tyrant
From his heav'nly perch on high,
As the word of Jesus' vict'ry
Floods the earth and fills the sky.
Wounded by a wound eternal
Now his judgment has drawn nigh!

6 Jesus, send Your angel legions
When the foe would us enslave.
Hold us fast when sin assaults us;
Come, then, Lord, Your people save.
Overthrow at last the dragon;
Send him to his fiery grave. © Peter M. Prange

8 Beloved, your Lord answers your prayer to send His Holy Angel, so that the evil foe may have no power over you. So come now to where angels and archangels, where Michael himself, where all the company of heaven, living and departed, is assembled in heavenly chorus, praising the Son of God. Here, your Lord does for you what He doesn't even do for angels, gives you His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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