

## The Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, A ✕ D 2009

**Matthew 18:1-11** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>5</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> "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! <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> 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 The battle was between the king of Syria and the king of Israel. For all of his numerical superiority, for all the horses and chariots that outnumbered those of the king of Israel, the king of Syria simply couldn't prevail. It was as if the king of Israel knew every move he would make even before he told it to his generals. So he called his servants to him, suspecting a traitor, and questioned them: "which of you is for the king of Israel?" "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." So the king of Syria dispatched his army to kill the prophet Elisha. When Elisha's servant woke up in the morning and saw the entire Syrian army encamped outside Elisha's house, he cried out, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" Elisha answered, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and

he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Ki 6)

2 There is an ongoing fight, one that your eyes cannot see. “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). Your fight is not against flesh and blood. No human being is your enemy. Your enemy is the devil and his allies, the world and your sinful flesh. And the devil’s highest desire is for you to die and go to hell. Nothing would make him happier.

3 Who is immune to his attacks? No one, not even the disciples who walked at Jesus’ side for three years, who learned directly from Him, who were eyewitnesses to miraculous healings, exorcisms, and resurrections. And still the devil knew their weakness. “Lord, which of us is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” So Jesus took a child, a little child, and stood him in their midst. Helpless by comparison, not great by anyone’s standards, a distraction to most who gather for worship, and the source of adjective like “childish,” “puerile,” “infantile,” and worse, the child is the example for the disciples. Be like this. Helpless, unpretentious, not concerned with who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Be like that, not like you are.

4 Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one through whom they come! 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. 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. But the problem is not with hands or feet or eyes. If you could cut them off or pluck them out and so win the fight against temptation, you'd be in comparatively better shape than you are now. Before you run to the kitchen for a knife, the problem is deeper than externals: the source of sin is your heart, the very core of your being. Cut that out and throw it away and you'll be dead, which, perhaps, is the point. You who have been joined into Christ's death through Holy Baptism are reborn.

5 Today is the feast of St. Michael and All Angels, proof that not all saints are humans. But what are angels? Are they the plump, prepubescent figurines that dot mantles and fill glass cases? Are they the frail maidens with flowing hair who top Christmas trees? Are they the cute little children in white robes who fill the cast of a pageant? No, they're warriors, the kind Elisha trusted to be there, the kind who intercedes even for the "little ones," the children of the Heavenly Father. St. John witnessed the battle between St. Michael and the devil.

6 This fight is incessant, but the war is 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, who fight with the blood of the Lamb. So the heavens rejoice at this resounding victory!

7 These angels, St. Michael and his legions, fight for you, the little ones, the children of God, reborn through the waters of Holy Baptism. You have become like little children, exalted above even angels as those to whom the Lord has shown mercy. The war is over. Jesus has won. The battle may still rage, but the war is over. Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. The devil is defeated. Even the hymns jeer at 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 By the blood of the Lamb, Michael defeated the devil. By the same blood of the Lamb, you have been delivered from the devil's grasp. The Lamb's blood, the very same blood shed on the cross, the very same blood by which Michael defeated the devil, will be here for you. The blood, around which the devil cannot stay, around which angels and archangels—St. Michael himself—gather to sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," is for you to drink, for the forgiveness of your sins. Surrounding the altar are legions of angels, even though your eyes cannot behold them. Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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