

Today, September 29, is the Feast Day of St. Michael and All Angels. We set aside this day to remember that God has spiritual beings who are in His service. We know a few of the angels by Name because Scripture names them. St. Michael (“Who is like God?”) is the archangel who is referred to as the Prince of Israel in Daniel 10 and 12. He is the guardian angel of the people of Israel, the people of God. In Jude 1:9, he contends with the devil about the body of Moses, and then in Revelation 12, Michael leads the host of heaven in throwing down the devil and his demons out of heaven to the earth. In art, Michael is pictured as a warrior stepping on the head of the devil who is portrayed as Satan or a dragon. This is derived straight from Revelation 12. These paintings are very similar to those of St. George, who is also known for slaying a dragon, except of course that St. Michael has wings.

What other angels do we know? We know the Angel Gabriel (“God is my strength”) is also named in the book of the prophet Daniel, as well as being the messenger who was sent to Zechariah to foretell the birth of John the baptist, and to the virgin Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of our Lord. Michael and Gabriel are the only two angels specifically named in the Bible.

The extra-biblical writings also discuss angels and list their names. Prominent among these is found in the book of 1 Enoch, which is an expansion on the beginning of Genesis 6, where angels interbreed with human women. This book was written during the inter-testamental period and is not scripture or even included in the apocryphal books that have sometimes been bound with the Bible. 1 Enoch mentions many angels. Through this and other sources, we note that in the time of Christ there was a fairly well-developed cult of angels, who were often worshiped as minor deities, even within Jewish practice. This incidentally gives us some background context on the first few chapters of the Book of Hebrews, where St. Paul (going with the traditional author here), argues for the superiority of Christ above the angels.

The 13th verse of Hebrews 1 quotes the beginning verse of Psalm 110 which we read today. Psalm 110, verse 1, reads, “THE Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Comparing this with Hebrews 1:13 we read, “But to which of the angels has He ever said: ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”? So even though Jesus, in becoming human like one of us, began His earthly sojourn as lower than the angels, in dying and rising and ascending, He became King over all,

so that the angels are subject to Him both in His divinity *and* His humanity.

Part of the angels' ministry is to us humans. The word, *angelos*, in the Greek means messenger, and we understand this to be their primary purpose. Angels are also sent by God to encourage and protect us in times of need. Sometimes their ministry to us is miraculous. Most of the time, their ministry to us may be undetected, but that does not mean that they do not exist. God uses them to answer prayers and to prompt us in doing good and growing closer to God. Let us also acknowledge that there exist evil spirits, those who rebelled alongside Satan, that seek to destroy us in tempting us to sin and to do things that are harmful and damaging to our faith and to the cause of Christ.

Let us give thanks this day for the protecting and guiding ministry of angels. Let us also be grateful that the Church has set aside this day to remind us of the reality of these spiritual beings. They are involved in a very real spiritual battle going on around us, which also involves us. The scriptures remind us of this battle and that we should not be complacent in our engagement, but take up the shield of faith with which we extinguish all the fiery arrows of the evil one. We are to follow the example of St. Michael and the angels and cast down all principalities and powers that would set themselves up against the kingdom of God. Those who do not engage in the battle risk becoming casualties of war. There is no neutrality. We progress towards Christ, or we retreat from Him. I pray that we are found in the former group and not the later.

Of course all of this is premised upon the fact that Jesus is Lord. To Him both we and the angels owe allegiance and obedience. Christ is reigning, right now, upon His heavenly throne, and all of His followers, both human and angelic, are called to fight the battle, to advance the kingdom. Again, we are reminded of Ephesians 6,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The battle ultimately belongs to God. He will see everything to rights if we only trust Him through obedience. He is in control. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar, not Kamala, not Donald ... not anyone else. Jesus is Lord.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus quotes the same verse from the Psalter that Hebrews 1:13 does, using it to stump the Pharisees. He first agrees with these religious leaders implicitly that David is the author of Psalm 110, and then, drawing implicitly from other scripture, he shows that the Messiah, the Promised One of God, is prophesied to be the Son of David. David, as the progenitor of the Messiah, was naturally thought to be greater than the Messiah. But in this verse, David refers to the Messiah as Lord. Why would the greater call the "lesser" Lord? Our reading ends, " And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

We know the answer to this question, because to us has been revealed that the Christ, the Son of David, is both God and Man. Christ is King, which truth our own parish is dedicated to, but the Pharisees do not have the Spirit of God to reveal this truth to them as we do. Due to blindness of mind and heart, they could not understand.

However, by God's grace, we have connected the dots (and could not have done without God's grace). The plan of God in Christ has been revealed to us. We have been given such a precious gift! In the epistle, St. Paul says,

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift;

Gift, gift, gift. It is all a gift. Our being, our lives, our salvation, our sustenance, our understanding of God and His plan, it is all a gracious gift. It is a gift of Christ the King to us. It is therefore a royal gift we being even adopted into the family of God. In everything we are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge so that we are lacking in nothing.

Let us also recognize that this gift is given us so that we may give it to others as well. It is not to be kept inside where we don't have to risk anything. It is not a light to be hidden under a bushel. It is to be shared. To keep it inside is to disengage from the battle. It is to capitulate. Instead we need to be strategizing how best to reach those outside of the Church. Ask yourselves the question, "What am I doing to reach others?" Certainly, we have opportunities to spontaneously share Christ on occasion. But are we being intentional about

finding ways to interact with those outside the church to build relationships, friendships, to love them as Christ loves us?

In our current series on the seven deadly sins, today's readings correspond to the sins of envy and vainglory. These sins use other people and desire to have what they have. The point of our readings today, however, is that we have everything we need from our Lord and King Jesus Christ. It seems that we don't take this gift seriously enough because God's grace has become so united to us that we usually take it for granted. Understand, however, that this is no minor trinket. Though it was free to us, it cost Jesus dearly; it has changed everything for us and for the whole world for the very much better.

So how do we nurture in our lives a greater awareness of God's grace? We must persistently, daily, spend focused time in fellowship with Christ. When you love someone, you spend time with him or her. I am glad for your participation weekly here at our Eucharist service. Some of you come on feast days, some to morning or evening prayer. We have the disciplines of the daily offices that also start to build that foundation of close spiritual connection. As Anglicans, we are not on our own when it comes to devotion, but we are invited to rely upon each other for help and encouragement. Lord willing, starting in Advent, we will have the daily offices every weekday here. Do not be a stranger to these services.

Having the foundation of corporate worship, let us not neglect our private devotions either. Each of us must find regular time to be quiet and alone with our Lord. In these times, we remember all of His gifts given to us through the loving suffering of Jesus of which we profoundly partake at every Eucharist. And in remembering his suffering for us, we then take up the sufferings of the world through intercessory prayer. Prayer, beginning with our corporate life together and then extending into our private lives, is the way to allow the grace of God to transform us so that we become deeply aware of His grace for us.

How much do we value our relationship with Christ? Will we make time to get to know Him better? I am the first to admit that in our busy lives we just don't have time for this. We have jobs and families and commitments. But, if I recall correctly, we read three Sundays ago from Matthew chapter 6 – "seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness. And all these things shall be added unto you." Make the time, my brothers and sisters, to get to know God, to

love Him better. You need this connection if you wish to engage in the battle.

The angels are waging war, fighting against evil powers that seek to undo us. This is the battle we are also in. The fight is ours, and the victory is ours in Christ. The foundation of our battling is our relationship to Jesus. May God convict us to desire His kingdom and righteousness first, may we learn to trust deeply in His provision for us, may our growth in the understanding of His love, cause us to minister to those around us. In the midst of all the troubles of life, let us know the goodness of God. Let us confess with the Psalmist, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Ps. 84:10)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.