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“With Us on the Battlefield”

Text: Matthew 18:1-11; Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3; Revelation 12:7-12

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today the Church commemorates Saint Michael and All Angels. Michael is one of the two angels named for us in the Scriptures - Gabriel is the other one, and probably the more well-known one. For Gabriel is the messenger. He came to Zachariah in the Temple and told him he would be the father of John the Baptist. He came to Mary and told her she would be the mother of God's Son. And perhaps he is also the angel who came to Joseph and gave him instructions concerning Mary and Jesus.

But by commemorating St. Michael - and not Saint *Gabriel* - and All Angels, we remember today that angels are not just messengers of God, but warriors of God. And that there is a great battle taking place between *the dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, and his angels*, who are fighting against God, and *Michael and his angels*, fighting for God. It is a battle that has been taking place since almost the very beginning. For sometime after the sixth day of creation, when *God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good* (Gen 1:31), the dragon and his angels turned against God and were cast out of heaven and down to the earth. And they immediately went on the attack, luring Adam and Eve into sin. And so quite rightly did we hear in Revelation: ***But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath.*** He has turned God's Paradise into a battlefield.

A battlefield. A place of devastation and horror and death. And though we cannot see it, that's what our world looks like to God, *who created all things visible and invisible*, as we confess in the Creed. So while the *visible* may look good to us - our houses and cars, our families and jobs, the *invisible* is a whole different story. There the battle is raging, **on the battlefield of our hearts and minds**. This creation is wearing out and passing away (Rev 21:1), and so the battle is not for this world and the things of it. No, the fight is for your thoughts and desires, and who you will fear, love, and trust.

Satan wants you to fear, love, and trust in anyone and anything but God - that's what he's fighting for. And so he fights with weapons to do just that. He fights with pleasures, to tempt us to love them and not God. He fights with horrors, that we think that God cannot be trusted, that is not good, and so turn to our own ways. He fights with lies, that we not fear God and believe His Word, but think that there are lots of ways, lots of words, lots of truths. He fights to capture our hearts and minds and so capture us for eternity. And he captures many with these weapons, does he not?

So what are the weapons of God that His angels fight with? We heard of them in the reading from Revelation: *the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony*, the Word of the Gospel. For by these the weapons of satan are countered and blunted. By these our hearts and minds are cleansed and put right again, with the right fear, right love, right truth of God. For now and for eternity.

And how serious is this battle? Well perhaps we are given a clue in the fact that whenever people see angels in the Bible, they are always frightened. Like Daniel, as we heard earlier. Some have suspected from this that angels must look really frightening - not like the common portrayals we see so much in popular art and books today, of delicate, feminine figures and chubby-cheeked cherubs. And maybe that's true, that angels do in fact look frightening. But maybe also it is because when these people were given to see angels they were given a glimpse of the spiritual battlefield they were on. They could see what was really all around them that normally could not be seen. And it terrified them, as it should.

For make no mistake about it, this is a serious battle and why God takes sin so seriously. For sin isn't just *breaking the rules* and so you have to go spend some time in the corner. Sin is you being a traitor and taking up the weapons of the enemy. And that is no small thing.

But that we diminish sin - *our sin*, at least, is one of the weapons of the dragon. Of course, we don't do that with the really big sins and sinners, like Aaron Alexis and Bashar Al-Assad. But our sins? Aw shucks, I really didn't mean it. I didn't mean to hurt anyone. Just a little indiscretion . . . it really doesn't matter.

Not so for Jesus. How does He speak of sin? ***Better for you to have a great millstone fastened around your neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Better for you to cut off your hand or foot or pluck out your eye than to be thrown into the eternal fire*** - that place meant not for any man, but for the dragon and his angels. Paradise, heaven, the glorious presence of God is the place prepared for us. Jesus said that too (John 14), that He is going to prepare a place for us, and that He will come back to take us there. But sadly, tragically, some will go to the eternal fire. Those who take up the weapons of the enemy and fight against God. Those who fear, love, and trust not God.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Like Daniel, those words of Jesus concerning sin should terrify you. And if that were all we knew, if that was the end of the story, then like Adam and Eve, the first man and woman attacked by satan, we should rightly be terrified of God and hide from Him.

But as you well know, that's not the end of the story. For a Lamb entered the battlefield. God so loved the world that into this world of traitors He sent His Son. Normally, 5-star generals don't go to the front lines, but have others do the fighting for them. But this one

did go. The Son of God came down to not only fight the dragon and win, and to not only take the punishment we traitors deserve, but to provide the life we need, to restore us as children of God and faithful sons of God.

And so Jesus came onto the battlefield and was tempted just as we are, to fear, love, and trust anyone and anything but His Father. But He did not succumb to the temptations of the evil one. He then went to the cross where He gave His perfect hands, His perfect feet, His perfect eyes, His perfect life in place of our sinful hands and feet and eyes and life. With the millstone of our sin hung around His neck He was plunged into the depth not of the sea but into the depth of hell and forsakenness by His Father in our place. And then with His victorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus now lives to give His victory and life to you.

And so in Holy Baptism, *sinner*s are plunged not into the depth of the sea with their sin, but plunged into Jesus' death and resurrection, to die to sin and arise with sins washed away and live restored as children of God. Children of God who then humble themselves in repentance, confessing our sins instead of cutting off our members, and continue to receive the cleansing forgiveness and the new life of our Saviour. That forgiveness and new life also poured out for you in the Body and Blood of the Supper, where the forgiveness, the medicine, the strength that you need is given to you in this heavenly food. That your hearts and minds be set on Him. That your fear, love, and trust be in your Saviour, your Father, and His Spirit alone.

That in the midst of the battle and the battlefield, you be not alone. For your Saviour is here through His Word and Sacraments, and He still sends His angels to fight for you. For as long as we live in this world and life, satan will fight and the temptations will come. And this is necessary. Yes, ***It is necessary that temptations come***, Jesus said. Which sounds odd, doesn't it? For wouldn't this world be a better place if God had just destroyed the dragon and his angels right away after they rebelled and was just done with it and with them? Wouldn't that have saved us a lot of grief? So it seems to me and maybe to you too.

But God knows what He's doing. And though the fight is fierce and the warfare long, there is an end to it coming. Either on the Last Day, when our Saviour returns with His angels and the dragon and his angels are finally cast into the eternal fire, or when the Lord sends His angels onto the battlefield as medics, to take His slain home to Him. Those, who we heard in Revelation, ***loved not their lives even unto death***. Some of them were slain in the battle in brutal ways, yet their death was not defeat and not the end for them. Satan took their lives but did not win those battles. And so the Church sings in one of her hymns: *Lord let at last Thine angels come, to Abram's bosom bear me home* (LSB #708). Victorious. And we've all known folks for whom that blessing, that reward, has happened.

But until that day, the battle goes on and the angels are fighting for us. Jesus told us that when it comes to children of God, ***their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven***. They are on the alert and standing at the ready, to go and fight on a moment's notice, at the direction of God. To go and defend God's little ones, you and me. That when satan and his lies and deception come, the angels and Word and truth of God come also, to strengthen heart and mind and keep our fear, love, and trust right and steady. That ***the blood of the Lamb and the Word of the Gospel*** protect and defend us.

We'll receive that blood in just a moment now, as we gather with *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven* at this Table, this Table which as we are reminded in the 23rd psalm (v. 5), is *prepared for us in the presence of our enemies*. Or in other words, on the battlefield. For our enemy is not flesh and blood, and his weapons not bullets or bombs. And so on this battlefield for hearts, minds, and souls, our Lord sets up His Table, a place of rest and peace and victory. And says *come*, for the forgiveness you need, for the strength you need, for the healing you need. Then go out and continue in the fight. Fearing not, for my angels and I are with you to the end.

And so as we sang and prayed earlier:

*Still let them aid us and still let them fight,
Lord of angelic hosts, battling for right,
Till, where their anthems they ceaselessly pour,
We with the angels may bow and adore* (LSB #520 v.4).

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.