

**“Heavenly Warfare:
Victory For The Children of God”
Matt 18:1-11;
(Rev 12:7-12; Dan 10:10-14; 12:1-3)**

In our text Jesus speaks about greatness in the kingdom of heaven and He uses a little child as an example. He warns against causing little ones who believe in Him to sin by saying it would be better to have a millstone be hung around our necks and be drown in the depth of the sea. In fact, it would be better to remove body part what cause us to sin rather than be cast into hell. He ends by saying: “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.”

So let's talk about Little children!

Little children are fed by their parents. Spoons of food are placed into hungry open mouths. That happens here as well—bread is placed into open mouths.

Little children are given drinks by their parents. First bottles, then sippy cups, and then normal cups held up to their lips. Just as here Sunday after Sunday—a cup of wine held up to thirsty lips.

Little children are read to by their parents. Stories to inform and to teach. Here in God's house as well—stories are read to teach us about ourselves, our world, and our God.

Little children are bathed by their parents, to wash off the grime of life. Likewise, here a bath is provided to wash off the grime of sin.

Little children are born into a family. And once again here also—all of us have been born again, born from above, into the family of God.

This is NOT to say that what we do here is childish. But that what we do here is for children. For the children of God. For you. No matter what your age, YOU are the children in Matthew's Gospel today. Children who always have angels serving you. Angels who always see the face of God.

In Old Testament Israel, the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and then later the “permanent” Temple, had images of angels sewn into the curtains and molded of pure gold above the Ark of the Covenant, because God was there, and wherever God is, there are angels. Always. It was a constant visual reminder of that invisible reality.

And although we don't have such visible images here, the invisible reality remains. As children of God, who have been given the Spirit of God, there are angels around you today, serving at your heavenly Father's instruction, protecting at His command, fighting those angels who want nothing to do with our heavenly Father, but rather rage against Him, and want only to destroy what belongs to Him. Who want to destroy you. To destroy you now, but even more, to take you away from the promises of God in Christ Jesus.

We heard of some of that battle today. Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels. The dragon and his angels losing their place in heaven and being thrown down here, where their raging continues. Good News for heaven, but not so good news for us.

So how good to know that the angels of God are still active and serving and fighting for us here. Like the angel at the entrance to the Garden of Eden, they protect us from what is not good for us. Can you imagine what would have happened had our first parents, having eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, been permitted to reach out their hand and eat from the tree of life? To live forever in this fallen sin-filled state? God has something better in store for us! Or Like the angels that filled the hills around Israel, they protect us from an enemy too large and too strong for us. (One solitary angel was able to destroy 185,000 of Sennacherib's army in a single night!).

And when Jesus was here, they also served as divine messengers, first proclaiming the good news of His coming birth to Mary and later appearing to Joseph in a dream to confirm the miracle of the Virgin birth. And then to proclaim the good news of His resurrection—"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen!" And still the holy angels stand at the ready, on alert, to serve.

Which is good, because there is great danger in this world and life. Not just physical danger, as we usually think when we think of danger—but spiritual danger. The danger of sin. That which is not OF God or FROM God. That which seeks to take us AWAY FROM God, promising life but giving only death. Like little children, we may not always see or feel or know the danger that comes with sin, but that makes the danger no less real.

And those who cause any of these little ones—you! - to sin, who put them into danger, they deserve to be treated as the evil angels were, says Jesus: "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." Better, because in the end, Satan and his evil angels will be cast not into a sea of water, but a lake of fire. And better to chop off hands and feet and gouge out eyes, Jesus says, than to be thrown into eternal fire. The message is clear: God's little children are precious to Him. Don't mess with them. Hands off!

But here, perhaps, the message is not so good for us. The angels around us children of God, protecting us, serving us, fighting for us—that's good. We like that. But this word of warning, is for us too. For us who not only sin ourselves, but who among us can claim that he hasn't caused another to sin? Isn't it we who deserve the millstone? And isn't it we who need to pay for our sins with our evil hands and feet and eyes... indeed, with our very lives? Is it not we who are on the precipice of that lake of fire, looking into an eternity of fire which never goes out yet never consumes? And what angel can save us from that? Not from the accusations of an evil foe, but from the just judgment of our Father?

So what no angel could do, God Himself did for us. That's why the angels were so joyous in proclaiming the birth and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus took the millstone we deserve and hung it around His neck. He gave His sinless hands and feet and eyes and life in place of yours. He took the fire of God's wrath against sin on the cross, that none of that be for you, but you be forgiven and restored to your place as children of God.

And so it is. Instead of being drowned in the depth of the sea, your sin and guilt are drowned in the waters of the Font, and in the Absolution, and you're given new life as a child of God. And instead of giving your body parts, you're given the Body and Blood of Jesus for your salvation, body and soul. And as you receive these, in humble repentance, YOU are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Because you are in Christ. And the angels of God rejoice over each and every sinners who repents.

And they aren't only rejoicing in heaven, they're rejoicing HERE, because as we pointed out before: wherever God is, THEY are, and God is here for you in the gifts of His Word and Sacraments.

Which brings us back to the little children we are again. Because another thing that little children are taught is to sing. We learn by singing. That's how we all learned our ABCs, and even the oldest among us here still remember that song. In fact, if I asked you to recite the alphabet right now, I can almost guarantee that that song would be playing in the back of your head! You may not remember a lot of other things you learned in school, but you surely remember that!

And so we sing. But not just by ourselves here—we also sing with the angels. When we sang “Glory be to God on High, and on earth, peace, good will toward men” earlier, that was the song of the angels before it was our song!

And when we'll sing in a moment “Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth”, that's the song of the angels around the throne of God that we are joining in with, adding our meager, cracking voices to their glorious, thunderous, temple-shaking voices.

And then later in that same song, when we sing “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”, we're joining NOT with angels, but with the children of God who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, where He was going to die. And so with the same words we welcome Him here, where the same Body and Blood that rode on that donkey and hung on that cross are here for us, to give us the victory of His resurrection over the guilt of our sin and the power of the grave.

This is what Satan is fighting to keep us from! Tempting us not just to do a sin here or there, but to find our life, our justification, our joy, our meaning, our hope, somewhere... anywhere else than in Christ alone—To make us think that we're grown up now and can do it ourselves; that we don't need to be fed and given drink and be read to; that we can stand on our own two feet! And, thus, lure us away from the care and nurture of our Father that is here for us.

But Jesus reminds us today that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are NOT those who grow up, who stand on their own two feet, or who can do it themselves—but the one who humbles himself like little children. Who receive what they need from the hand of their heavenly Father. And who know there's no better place to be.

Which brings us, finally, to the fact that little children are carried where they go. Most of us here today were not carried physically, but some are. But we were brought here by the Holy Spirit, given to us and who continues to keep us in the faith and connected to Jesus. And as we gather here, we await the day when God will send His angels one last time for us, to

CARRY us, His little children, to Him, our Father. To our heavenly home. We sing of that too.
“Lord, let your servant depart in peace...”

So from start to finish, the angels are with us. Those working against God, but even more, those working in His service. You interacted with angels all this week, more than you know. So today, on this the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, we especially thank Him for the holy angels even as we look forward to the day when what we can't see here, we WILL see there. When, as Daniel said in our Old Testament reading, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” That place where there is no darkness, only light; no evil, only good; and no danger, only peace. Men, women, martyrs, apostles, prophets, patriarchs... all His little children with the angels! Together! Forever! In the Name of Jesus, Amen.