

## 1989: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

*Now is come salvation and strength, and the Kingdom of our God,  
and the power of his Christ." Revelation 12:10*

The Epistle lesson for the feast of St. Michael and All Angels is taken from the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation. We are told that there was "war in Heaven", and that St. Michael and his Angels fought against the devil and his angels who were overcome and cast out. St. Michael and his Angels are those pure spirits who carry out the will of God. Everything which opposes God's sovereign will is defeated and utterly cast down. All salvation, power, and strength comes from God and rests in His Kingdom. St. Michael and all Angels represent for us the perfectly governed, perfectly ordered, and peaceful Kingdom in which God is worshipped and adored.

St. Michael and All Angels proclaim for all to hear that the devil and every evil thing which would attempt to separate us from God must be overcome. But how are we to win such a victory? Our Epistle lesson tells us the answer. "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony."

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, willingly offered His life for us as a sacrifice. That sacrifice was a full, perfect, and sufficient offering on our behalf. That sacrifice is the means by which we may be forgiven and restored to a loving relationship with God. The sacrifice of Our Lord pays the price for our sins and allows us to receive forgiveness and salvation as a free gift. If we belong to Christ, nothing can separate us from God and the Love He has for us. Satan is called the "accuser of our brethren". (Rev. 12:10) This accuser is defeated and cast down by the blood of the Lamb, by the sacrifice of Christ. St. Paul asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any charge against God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? ...I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers...nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord." (Romans 8: 31-39)

A Christian overcomes the forces of evil by realizing that their defeat has already been accomplished by Christ. We must draw near to Our Lord, trusting only in His merit and seeking His strength and guidance. We are told by St. Jude that St. Michael defeated the devil in this manner. He simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee", (Jude 9) The devil is defeated by the power of Christ working in us.

The devil is also defeated by "the word of testimony". St. Michael is often pictured holding a sharp two-edged sword. This sword is the word of God. (Heb. 4:12., Rev. 1:16., 2:12,16., 19:15,21.) We must live by the word of God. The Holy Bible is God's Word Written. (Article 20. p.706 Prayer Book.) It is "a lantern unto our feet and a light unto our path". (Psalms 119:105) Our Lord tells us that we are to spiritually live on God's word. (Matthew 4:4) Our Lord resisted the temptations of the devil by countering each of the devil's claims with a passage from God's word. The word of God is our greatest weapon. We should read that word, and study that word until it is inwardly digested. Martin Luther wrote:

And were the world all devils ore and watching to devour us,  
We lay it not to heart so sore, not they can overpower us.  
And let the prince of ill look grim, as ere he will;  
he harms us not a whit, for why? His doom is writ!  
A word shall quickly slay him. Hymn 405

The Gospel reading for St. Michael and All Angels is from the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. Our Lord is speaking about children when he says that the angels of the children always behold the face of the Heavenly Father. Our Lord is asked who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. He places a young child in the midst of them and proclaims that the child is the greatest of all. He says that "unless ye

be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

We have been blessed once again at this conference with the presence of little children in the persons of Anna and Miriam Westin. How is it that we should imitate them? Little children like Anna and Miriam do not understand why they must do the things that are good for them. They must be guided by the reason of others, namely their parents. Anna and Miriam will gradually grow in their ability to understand and see the reason in things, but while they are children they must simply obey the word of their parents and be guided by the reason of those words.

Our spiritual lives are like that. We must be obedient to God's word and be guided by that word. In faith, we shall seek to understand God's word and we shall, by degrees, grow in "wisdom and spiritual understanding". (Colossians 1:9) We must, in humility, seek the "wisdom which is from above" (James 3:17) which is ours if we will but ask for it. (James 1:5)

This is why we have a St. Michael's Conference. By the study of Holy Scripture, theology and spirituality in the context of Christian fellowship and prayer, we seek to grow in the wisdom which is from above in all spiritual understanding.

Each member of the staff at this St. Michael's Conference considers it a privilege to have an opportunity to teach the faith of the Lord we love to young people who have come here to grow in that faith. We are thankful, inspired, and often humbled when we see how the Lord is working in your lives. Please be assured that we will pray for you and that we leave this conference with each one of you in our hearts.

Conferences like this one seem to go so quickly. There is a sense in which we would like to see it go on and on and not have to end. But this conference must end because its purpose is to equip you to live the Christian life in the world on a day to day basis. But then, this earthly life we live must also pass. We were created to have eternal fellowship with God. We can never be truly happy and truly at peace and truly at rest apart from this fellowship with God.

If you have come to know something of the joy and peace and love of God by your attendance at this conference, please remember that what you have come to know here is but a small and partial reflection - a faint taste, of the eternal joy, peace and love which is ours in Heaven. The point of this conference is to teach us to set our "minds on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1) We must, by faith, draw near to Our Lord Jesus Christ and live in Him. We must come to obey, and know, and love His Word. We must draw near to Him as He draws near to us in the Church's sacraments. We must above all, seek to know in our own lives the peace and joy and ordered love of the life of Heaven where St. Michael and All Angels proclaim: "Now is come salvation and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ". AMEN.

The Rev'd D. A. Petley